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ABSTRACT

Ten graduate students in English attack their graduate (M.A. and Ph.D.) experiences which they consider to be narrow and demeaning. They point to intellectual, financial, and personal difficulties which beset them, as well as petty, unnecessary rigors and delays to which they are subjected and which often prolonged graduation. They speak of drudgery and a worship of scholarship which, for the most part, overlooks a personal discovery of art and the search for meaning. The students also condemn the dilemma of the graduate student-teacher, the lack of preparation for teaching freshmen composition courses, and discrimination against women in graduate schools. (MF)

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The Graduate Experience in English

AN INTRODUCTION TO TEN CASE-HISTORIES

"It wastes and saps these brilliant young persons."

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EVER SINCE I ENTERED graduate school in English in 1946, I have been called to dark corners of corridors or asked to sit in faculty offices behind closed doors and listen to chapters from a book I would title *Tales of Neglect and Sadism*:

CHAPTER I. The student with wife and two children whose graduate career was unexpectedly prolonged for two years, not because he had failed in any way, but because his major professor was afraid to ask for acceptance by other professors in the university of the student's new linguistic work, which the professor had all along advocated.

CHAPTER II. A dozen students who had lost a year or more (living without full-time employment while struggling to keep their families with them) because their thesis advisor postponed conferences with them and sometimes kept them waiting two hours when they had secured an appointment. Often the delay was for a year, while the professor went abroad or on sick leave.

CHAPTER III. Scores of students who took years writing theses (or gave up the thesis and the degree) because their advisor could not be satisfied—I know two who reported that their advisor suggested that, for example, Chapter 5 would go better as the beginning of Chapter 1; they made the change and months later were advised by the same man (who had forgotten), that the beginning of the revised Chapter 5 would now go better as the beginning of revised Chapter 1.

CHAPTER IV. Women students at one famous southern university who were bullied in class by a senile professor of American literature who asked them to read sexual passages from novels and then flayed them with quick, insistent questions. One excellent student put her head down on the desk in class and cried. She was later asked by an alumni group to contribute to a volume of critical scholarship memorializing this professor when he died.

But however terrifying these revelations, they were expressed to me as gripes, not as evidence for action to correct injustices. I ask myself does that mean the complaints were trivial, that most graduate experience is healthy, and that those who complained to me have been the weaklings constitutionally incapable of carrying through a difficult program or finishing a long piece of writing under any circumstances? I know that some of these persons unconsciously wanted to fail; their mistaken feelings of inadequacy were strong. One developed false heart attacks every time he approached the language examination in German. But most of them—I would say ninety-percent—were gifted, driving persons who as college teachers had proved to themselves and to others their professional capacity and responsibility. And yet they suffered these outrageous delays and rebuffs. The fact that a submerged and mistreated group does not rebel for centuries—think of the American Negro—does not prove that its complaints are without substance. After many years of cooling reflection I have decided that the Establishment of graduate schools in English is indeed rotten and that its diseases of narrowness and hypocrisy are real. The tales I hear from graduate schools in physical science suggest that doctoral candidates do not need to be stalled and demeaned in their work.

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The following ten case-histories of graduate school experience at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels were not hard to find. I simply asked the first ten good writers that came to my mind, and when one reneged, another volunteered the name of a colleague who wrote the tenth history. I have known many strong graduate students in English; the weak ones have been a tiny percentage. I do not need to take a poll to find that most graduate students in English are lively, brilliant, and creative. Yet I know almost none who feel that their experience as graduate students in English was lively, brilliant, and creative. I know only a handful whose graduate work made a lasting contribution to their own professional work and to others in the field of English. (I must add that although the graduate departments I studied in were deadening and often unconsciously sadistic in their organization and ritual, I was allowed to write two theses that were of value to me throughout my professional career.)

What hurts most about the run of graduate work in English is that it wastes and saps these brilliant young persons. And in fact, many are not young when they begin their study; the system stalls them and ages them, draining them of energy as they try to teach and study and go back to teach before finishing their degrees. In my opinion the ten persons who have written the following case-histories (they range from a 22-year-old to a 45-year-old) command their experience and their sentences. They exhibit insight, maturity, and liveliness that shows them on top of their materials—the kind of professional persons English departments dream of hiring, and yet nine out of ten report their graduate experience cramping and stultifying. If the experience were of high caliber it would hone and release these persons to an accomplishment that would aid other English teachers. Neither they nor I ask for an easy curriculum; no good student ever does. But the demands made of them are too often narrow and piddling, or wide and empty.

Graduate students in English are not respected by the system. When they reach this ultimate position in their study, they are asked to write more cribbed and cabined papers than they were as freshmen. Neither their minds nor their maturity is respected. Often striving to maintain an edge of superiority over his students, the graduate professor finds he has read more of Crabbe or Faulkner or Shakespeare than his "charges," and much more criticism, and runs shouting to his colleagues that his students have read nothing. It is to be expected that the canon of any establishment will be less known to its novitiates than to its establishers. A professor may respect and challenge the graduate student at the same time he asks him to enlarge his reading and to learn the minor discipline of documentation of scholarly papers.

How seriously a presupposition of invulnerability infects graduate professors I remember witnessing myself. The only great (or even good) classroom professor I encountered in my M.A. program at a distinguished university taught Chaucer, and with both disciplined scholarship and a response to Chaucer's humanity that appropriately involved smacking of lips and horselaughs of appreciation. A man of power, and yet when fresh out of the army, I wrote an attack on a famous Chaucerian scholar's dreary and obtuse analysis of the story in which an old man marries a young girl because she is a succulent dish, the professor read a lecture to the whole class about respecting distinguished scholars. We were in no position, he said, to make fun of great scholars. He did not read my paper to the class and he did not try to rebut

my argument that through his prissiness the scholar had missed the major point of the story.

When I was president of a graduate students' group in an English department, one Ph.D. Candidate told me that his professor insisted that he enlarge his thesis (a critical study of French poems he had translated) by treating a number of historical parallels. The change in scope, the student said, would take him far beyond his interest competence and produce a routine dissertation rather than expose a central problem in translating and present to the English-speaking world a body of work by a valuable poet. I called the graduate group together and we decided to approach the graduate professors in support of our fellow-student—at least to consider the case. Before doing this, I talked to my major advisor, who was the number two man in power in the department. He said he was shocked by the suggestion of our taking such an action; we were in no position to do such a thing; he was so sure the head of the department would be outraged that he advised we drop the matter immediately. I regret to say we lacked the courage to proceed. Like most academic men we were not willing to risk our careers for a principle. The student group I presided over had been founded by the department head as a front to suggest to the outside world that graduate students there were treated as responsible, intelligent adults.

The following case-histories project a feeling of immediacy because all but two of the writers had not finished their degrees when they were writing. But for the same reason only one documents the most frequent charge made by American professors against the graduate school: that it is cruelly slow to approve Ph.D. theses, commonly allowing a student to finish his course work in two years and then stalling him for another two to five in thesis throes. At the university I attended, the English graduate professors in power believed religiously in the concept of ordeal. The experience was to be a trial by fire and any act or word of unreasonableness on their part was justified by saying that it helped the candidate suffer, and thus grow in manhood and professionalism. They went so far as to admit that at times they would let weak candidates through faster than strong because the strong ones needed tempering. The principle is not a bad one if it means the strong are challenged and stretched more than the weak, but it is criminal if the strong are simply harassed and slowed down. Most of the graduate students were mature men and women who had left decent jobs. Their financial and emotional resources were being drained by trips across the country and their scratching to make a living as graduate assistants or part-time workers in the city.

I have asked the contributors of these case-histories to write anonymously, both to protect them in their careers and to insure that readers will not recognize the university being reported upon. One or two adverse statements about a graduate English program in a named university might unfairly damage that institution if it did not have a chance to reply, and I see no end to a running debate of charge and counter-charge. And yet I have collected these histories and published them here precisely because the graduate student in America has seldom spoken in public voice. He has taken abuse, hypocrisy, and small-mindedness and gone back grumbling to his library carrel. It is time he spoke out. I do not believe these histories represent a movement. They are not a Tom Paine call-to-arms, but, I believe, solid, specific, and passionate evidence on which a revolution might be founded. A genuine reform of the graduate ex-

perience in English in this country will not be brought about by resolution within faculties. What is needed is a massive shake-up brought about by both graduate students and the professors who teach them. The graduate departments reported on here are located in the most eminent universities in the land, in New England, California, the near South, the Southwest, the Midwest. I have never heard or read a word to suggest that the feelings expressed by these graduate students are not epidemic in America.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication has a stake in graduate training. It is the graduate student, either dully going through his rounds as student, or stale out of the university, degree in hand, who attempts to teach freshmen how to write.

K.M.

+ case-history 1

"I could not recommend the total experience to anyone."

As I LOOK BACK ON IT I THINK what really signalled the end of graduate study for me was the unsmiling young Internal Revenue man saying, "What we have to determine are your motives for getting the Ph.D. If you got it because your employer specified it as necessary for your continued employment in your present position, then you may claim the deductions you've itemized." He paused and glanced out the open window into the warm late May air. "But if on the other hand you pursued the degree for personal satisfaction and/or self-aggrandisement, we cannot allow these deductions."

If this incident ended my graduate study, where did it begin, and why? Perhaps when, after I had taught four years at a small west coast public college, my superiors made it clear they wanted a faculty with doctorates and that untenured people were being let go if they didn't have degrees, and so I was jobless, with a wife and three kids. I was a little mad, too, and my feelings were hurt. Even in four years I had achieved some reputation as a good teacher. And I had cheerfully taken on every job that I had been asked to do.

I had the choice of doing something other than teaching to earn a living, or facing the necessity of getting the Ph.D. I had finished an M.A. the year before at a distinguished private western university. I couldn't have gone there without the G.I. Bill. The experience was largely unsatisfactory. I had some pretty vague (but brilliant, I thought) ideas about the whole field of language, literature, communication, and education. The M.A. program seemed restrictive and static to me. I was one M.A. candidate among hundreds. I could have dropped dead and no one but the registrar would have noticed. I knew I didn't want to do doctoral work there.

I have asked myself many times if the primary motive for working for the Ph.D. was job security. I think it was. My intellectual interests could have been very adequately fulfilled outside the Ph.D. framework, provided I could find the university where there would be the broad-ranging and seminal minds that fitted into my educational myth, a myth evolved during the long, stultifying years in the army. This dream of the com-

munity of fine minds and gentle spirits became in the boring grind of two and a half years on Pacific Islands my favorite fantasy. And it persisted after an M.A. and four years of college teaching.

I had done a number of things to make a living and had been fairly successful at them all. Though I gave some thought to leaving teaching, I really don't think I ever seriously considered it. I liked teaching. I liked being around young people and in general I liked my colleagues.

The people I really didn't like were the administrators. I suppose as *people* I didn't dislike them. But it takes an unusual person not to be corrupted by the process of administration. I have known one or two such, and I have known a few fine teachers who became administrators and were corrupted. I think they came to think that administration was more important than teaching. To me, that's corruption.

Because of my general dissatisfaction with my M.A. program, I had been shopping around for some time for something more appealing in a doctoral program—mainly by reading college catalogs and writing to department chairmen. I was sophisticated enough to know that catalog descriptions are not the programs (like maps and territories), but there seemed no better way to go about it. By the time my final semester at Small Western State had ended, I had decided to try a summer session at a large private eastern metropolitan university. The catalog described a degree program that emphasized inter-disciplinary studies in language, literature, communication, and higher education, especially suitable for those who wished to teach English in undergraduate colleges of various kinds. The description made it sound intellectually exciting—and terribly sensible when compared with the twenty or so other descriptions I had read. A summer session should indicate something about the fit between the description and the program.

It was a bad June for me to leave my family. My wife was eight months' pregnant with our third child. She wanted me there, but realized that I was anxious about my future and she did her best to assure me that she could face her final month alone. I had never been east before and decided to go Greyhound, four nights and three days from coast to coast, very cheaply, with a hundred and fifty pounds of clothes and books in footlockers. This method, I told myself, would give me a real feel for the sweep of the land: three thousand miles of vibrations sent up to me from the asphalt and concrete surfaces of Highways 40 and 50 and others, through rubber and air and metal. People have always thought it pretty crazy to go all that way by Greyhound, and especially without stopovers. I arrived in New York with something of the feeling of the sailor coming ashore—I needed a little time to get my land legs—and a bath and shave.

I of course was not aware of it at the time, but the next years were to be important ones in my development as a person and as a teacher. My summer work consisted of general departmental courses in language, literature, and communication – courses designed to give some indication of the flavor of the place. The language course was an especially significant experience for me. I encountered linguistics for the first time. I read Sapir and Bloomfield. The literature course was too elementary for me, and the communication course, made up of separate lectures, though interesting, was mosaic in structure rather than integrated.

My third child and second daughter was born on July 4. I led a lonely, interesting life in the green eastern summer, missing my family and (sometimes) the brown, fragrant hills of the

west. As the academic summer closed I felt good enough about the program to return west for my family. We drove east in September and set up housekeeping in a run-down veterans' village about an hour's commute from the university.

The family's part in the next few years is a separate, often poignant story that cannot be told here. Such stories as ours can be evaluated in two ways. As wonderfully rich opportunities for new experiences for wife and children, or as confining times of hardship, of years during which almost total accommodation is made to the husband and father's needs. The evaluation does not have to be made either-or, of course, but the family, it seems to me, is seldom in a very happy position. As a family we were initially quite wretched, the housing was wretched, the school situation for the oldest child was wretched. By the following February we were able to move into an apartment near the university. Life for the family improved greatly.

The first year of study, as I now think of it, was quite satisfactory. It was a time of getting acquainted, with a new way of living, with new people, and importantly for this story, with other graduate students and the staff of the department. There was the process of finding one's place in the new community, of establishing the human relationships. During the summer session I had been quite anonymous. We are all well aware of the great difference in the academic "feel" between summer and regular sessions. Now I discovered, as temperatures fell and my family and I pleasurably began to experience our first eastern autumn, that I was operating in a rather tight little community. That I was recognized, identified, was signalled when I was offered an assistantship by the professor who taught the introductory language course.

I know of no graduate school which provides all the information about the details of a doctoral program that a graduate student needs. I found that older generations of graduate students provide the best source of information (and often mis-information) about the particulars of the program. Unfortunately, they often bequeath along with it a tradition of anxiety and fear about the great array of requirements.

The degree program I finally settled on (there were several patterns) involved interdepartmental cooperation. This suited my notions about the interdisciplinary studies. Though this arrangement perhaps contributed to my education in some minimal way, it did not contribute to my getting the degree. Not that I was entirely naive about interdepartmental matters. I suppose I had (and still have) faith that men of reason and good will can rise above narrowness of view—even administrators.

Anyway, that first year was spent in study, in learning the dynamics (not to say politics) of the department in which I worked. I liked and respected most of the people I met, both students and staff. As the shortcomings of the staff began to emerge, as scholars, teachers or administrators, it seemed to me that I could find redeeming characteristics in them. Most of my courses and seminars furthered my education. Some were duds, but where would one not find a dud now and then? Of great importance was the fact that I had a place in the department. I was recognized as a person of some promise in the program and though no formal (or informal) document stated this, I knew it.

As the first year ended I began to anticipate the demands of the second year. I hoped to have the degree by the end of the year. I didn't have it and was not to have it for an additional four

years. I thought so then and feel so now: it was through no fault of my own that I didn't get the degree at the end of the second year of work.

I had settled on a dissertation topic, had taken preliminary examinations, had passed one foreign language examination, and had completed almost all course work, before the second year began. I had a genuine sense of security about being "on schedule." I also had a good fellowship, which helped the family economy.

I began to realize there were certain hazards in the situation. Other doctoral candidates, I discovered, had been working on the degrees for long periods of time. They referred to other candidates likewise stalemated. Others and I became interested in the ratio of completed degrees to uncompleted degrees over a fairly long period of time, say ten years. It soon became apparent that many started but few finished. I became aware of something else: that my experience of a fairly smooth, routine first year was not unusual. It was in the concluding year that trouble developed. At first I felt that I merely needed to plan carefully, to anticipate fully in order to finish on schedule. I was naive.

The difficult thing was to discover why the situation was the way it was. I'm not sure I ever have. Some things were obvious. The staff was conscientious. As a matter of fact, they were all over-worked, over-committed. Each one had in addition to a large load of advising, classes to teach, research to carry forward, consultancies, and other distractions. They just had no time to do the close, careful advisory work that has to be done with a doctoral student. It was difficult to get appointments and when one did get them, advisers were ill-prepared to advise or didn't have sufficient time. They were usually apologetic about it. My dissertation involved inter-departmental negotiations and the cooperation of a national professional organization. I needed staff assistance and advice. I got little or none. Interdepartmental negotiations were postponed. The whole year seeped away without the dissertation even being approved. I spent much of my time gossiping and complaining with other doctoral candidates. I finished all steps except the dissertation. At the year's end I received word that the dissertation topic had been approved but that I would need additional course work in certain research procedures, since my record showed none, and my proposed topic seemed to necessitate course work of this kind. I was stunned. Course work was long past me. I tried to negotiate with the official whose decision it was but I got nowhere and got little if any support from the members of my dissertation committee. My topic had been proposed a year before. I had a dissertation committee who approved my topic. Supposedly they knew what research techniques were appropriate. Now another person in the university hierarchy was telling me (and them) that I must do more course work.

That's exactly what I did during the summer. I was out of money. I had no job for the coming year. I had counted on the new degree for turning up something attractive. I generally felt pretty sour about the whole experience. I wanted to blame someone or some thing, yet I still felt a sense of loyalty, and affection even, for the members of my department. They hadn't planned this to happen to me. But my experience, I had discovered, was usual.

I have talked as if getting a degree were primarily a matter of negotiation rather than education. I'm afraid it too often is—and I doubt that it makes any contribution to one as a teacher or scholar. My *education* as a doctoral student was fairly satisfactory, particularly during the first year. Negotiation and anx-

ieties in connection with getting finished distracted me from study during the second year.

Late in that very unpleasant summer I got a one year appointment in an upstate college. My major adviser left the university. Even so, I finally started the dissertation. The following year my family and I moved back west. So far my work toward the degree counted for nothing in terms of salary or rank.

Eventually, after four years, a new adviser, a lost file (mine), considerable inter-departmental haggling, and correspondence larger than the dissertation, I flew east for final orals. They were smooth, incredibly (almost disappointingly) easy.

With the degree came promotion. Having it has made all the difference. That seemed to be the end of the story—in a way, finally, happy enough. But it came up again the following May. I claimed transportation and other expenses as deductions on my income tax return. I asked the young Internal Revenue man how he proposed to determine my *real* motive in getting the Ph.D. He didn't know. I suggested psychoanalysis and asked if the fee would be deductible. He didn't know about that either. I really had hold of the idea and now I wanted to know what my real motive was. When he got his turn to speak, the young Internal Revenue man said they would let me know by mail. In about a week they did. They allowed my deduction.

About once a year I get a letter from the university, sometimes the department too, urging me to recommend promising young men and women to them for graduate work. I wish I could. I'm sure my experience there has contributed considerably to me as a human being and teacher, but so far, remembering the hazards—the needless delays, the negotiations—I have not felt that I could recommend the total experience to anyone.

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"Literature here is studied as if it were a dead cat . . ."

THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE can be the beginning of a love affair with life. It was for me. My perceptions changed; reality became a place where beauty and sensation and idea were all at once present, part of the internal me and the external not-me. The world I moved in was an exciting one where students and faculty shared in the love and challenge of knowledge. I enjoyed that world and chose to remain within it. Graduate school would be more of the same, the next step leading me to a career as a college teacher.

I am now a graduate student. I have found in graduate school not the love of learning, but the industry of scholarship; not ferment, but stagnation. My mind is encouraged to move over only the still waters of facts, leaving unsounded the turbulent depths of art. Literature is studied here as if it were a dead cat, something to be dissected and described externally and internally, placed in a species and class, dated, and preserved on a dusty shelf while file cards take up the reality of its existence. And as in biology where the creator of

the cat, the mystery some call God, is irrelevant, so too in the study of literature, the author as the mystery called man, is forgotten. He is an object, dissected and described externally and internally, placed and shelved, remade by scholarship. We forget that his humanity created the piece of literature we study, for humanity cannot be footnoted.

I complain here about an intangible dimension, but the sense of its presence in literature, and the disturbing awareness of its absence in the graduate approach to literature confuses me. I do not want to venerate the author's agonized spirit, but I do expect to remember that his work is a statement from him to me about life. Great literature grows from suffering and joy, and teaches me because I have known those states. Divorce the transcendental from literature, and it is reduced to a skillgame of words, just as life lived on only its mundane level is mere movement.

We had a poet on campus. Literature for him was part of life. He spoke to us of feelings expressed as well as techniques of expression. Symbols of poetry are first of all symbols from lived reality, he said; only from that origin do they move successfully into literature. His mind moved through the rough waters of art. He spoke from a wider perspective, one that included other fields—cinema, psychology, sociology—and also that evasive quality, humanity. His class was not popular, because he was not giving out facts. Unfortunately, the feeling of poetry is not testable, and our study here is directed toward tests. Graduate study needs to include his point of view, both in its approach to literature and in its conception of the graduate student.

For graduate school also makes a mistake in its attitude toward graduate students. I agree that graduate instructors should not be nursemaids hovering over budding scholars, or graduate schools educational playpens. If anywhere, undergraduate school is the place for that. I walk alone now, and I expect to be treated as a member of the academic race, as a potential colleague. My expectation has been so unfulfilled that I now feel guilty and presumptuous for having even thought of it. I am merely a thing called Master's Candidate, something which reads at breakneck speed, writes papers, and passes a required number of courses with A's and B's. I appreciate the assumption that I can, to a great degree, absorb knowledge through lectures, and read well enough to educate myself. But I need help, too. That's one reason why I'm here. If I have a good paper or a challenging idea, I don't want to be told to write an article; I want to talk about it. If I don't understand something, I don't want to be afraid to admit it. I told one of my instructors once that I was having difficulty in reading the poetry of Robert Browning. "Oh," was his reply.

This atmosphere has led me to a kind of despair. I have felt religious despair and find it the only fit analog for the hopelessness and confusion I've felt this year. My doubts in my own ability to succeed in graduate study are enormous, but I can neither justify or disprove them. My work has received such varied and contradictory judgments here that I no longer know what I am capable of. I see this confusion in my friends, too. Who we are, what we can do, why we are here, how we relate to the graduate machinery, are all questions which anguish us periodically. We contemplate changing our schools, fields, countries.

Our complaints are often the main topic of our conversation and they feed upon one another, bloating our discontent. I was talking to another M.A. candidate the other day before our one o'clock class. He looked especially grim

and I asked him why. He told me that he and two other students, both graduate teaching assistants in English, had sat drinking in his apartment all night until seven that morning. I asked why. The other two, he said, wanted to be drunk when they taught their eight o'clock classes. Why? Just a way of rebelling.

That kind of protest alters nothing. But because we fear censure, because we are judged so abstractly, we rail only amongst ourselves or through futile fits of rebellion. I know of no student who has complained to a member of the faculty. Communication, infinitely important to me, is generally absent here. I have had one conference during which I felt my instructor cared that I was a human being. Nothing, not even graduate school, can kill the possibility for communication. But it does not encourage it, and all my other meetings have been brief, formal, and factual.

If the teaching attitude I see here were the only one I knew, I would never consider becoming a college teacher. My undergraduate experience convinced me of how much good a teacher can do for a student by opening his mind to ideas and art as well as teaching him facts, and graduate school has not been able to obliterate that.

Graduate school will make me a better teacher. Any experience which increases my range of knowledge will. But its contribution could have been greater. I have learned many facts, but few writing skills. In only one course this year did the instructor read our papers as pieces of writing. It came in my last term, and I realized then how unimproved my writing has remained. Papers in other courses were judged on the basis of length, perfection of mechanics, and material—largely in that order. In a system which perpetuates publish or perish, it seems contradictory that good writing is not more highly valued. Regardless of publishing, however, we should be writing poetry and fiction, as well as factual papers. Only if we continually know something of what it means to try to create literature, can we successfully study it. I think again of our poet. But graduate school allows little time for creative writing.

Living in discontent has made it even more difficult for me to justify to myself this way of life. Literature is a form of reality, but the study of literature can be highly unreal. Against the facts of men dying in Vietnam, of Negroes fighting to have affirmed their humanity, of a man assassinating our President, the fact of the date of *Doctor Faustus* is meaningless. I struggle daily to maintain my perspective. I affirm in my life a sense of order and continuity. I believe in progress. Thus, I do understand why I must go through this. The goal—becoming a college teacher—remains clear, even though the means make little sense. A man who must give the army two years before he can begin the serious part of his life must feel much the same way. Friends who have made it through, and some who have not, urge me to stick to it, get it over with. Five years of sheer idiocy is worth it. The system demands it. I agree and I acquiesce; but I often have no appetite, and I do not always fall easily asleep. Why must graduate school be something to be endured? It could be one of the greatest times of our lives.

I blame some of my discontent on myself. I do not always grasp the mechanics of a situation quickly, especially when I dislike them, and once I do see how I must operate, I refuse to give in without a struggle. If I could swallow my idealism and realize that in order to play the game for the prize, the established rules must be strictly followed, I would be better off. From the moment an instructor gave me a B on a paper because some of my footnotes were in-

correct and three words were misspelled, saying "Graduate students don't do those things," I should have accepted the new set of values and acted accordingly. When I think about the narrow-mindedness behind such a restricted point of view, I'm glad I didn't. But when I remember that money depends upon grades, I'm less pleased with my obstinacy.

I conclude with the one part of graduate school which makes all the rest of it endurable: fellow graduate students. I continue to find friends around me whose interests, and often problems, match mine. The longer I remain in school, the further removed I feel from the common concerns of ordinary life. When I ride the subway and watch and listen to the people, I know my isolation. The ivory tower of graduate school is too high, but if I must walk at that dizzy level, I need people there with me. Together, we can endure, and await the time when we will descend back into reality.

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"This graduate school is no treadmill . . ."

"WHEN I GROW UP, I'm going to do things just like Daddy. I'm going to learn all about mining and machinery and tractors. I'm going to earn a lot of money and be free and independent! It must be wonderful to be a grown-up." So, at seven years of age, I announced to my older sister. But her superior wisdom mocked:

"You be free and independent—you do what you choose. You're a girl! Women can't do what they choose. They must stay home and take care of the children. Only men can choose their work."

"I won't take care of the children! I never liked dolls, anyway."

"What silly talk! You just wait and see."

My seven-year-old wrath burned hot that I had been born female, as I retreated from my older sister's retort. Was she bitter too? Certainly she sounded no more happy about a woman's lot than I. As a friend has said, "Women are charming, delightful—all very well in their way, but, after all, who would ever choose to be one?" There are women who claim they would choose their lot, but, I am sure, my sister and I would not have, and my anger at seven years is still vivid in my memory.

Now I am, without choice, free, independent and able to choose my work. Perhaps I am playing the man's role I desired so heatedly thirty years ago. The intermediate years as wife, housewife and mother have been good, much happier than my wrath at seven years foresaw. I have long thought I could not live without my husband. He is gone, and independence, freedom to do what I really enjoy is unexpectedly rewarding, even while I miss him on whom I was so dependent.

I came to graduate school, frivolously eager to perfect myself in English—to learn how to write well, how to judge good writing, and how to read voluminously. My excessive love for reading had previously only won reprimands and aroused my own feelings of guilt and escapism. Now suddenly it became a virtue, a source of potential profit, and

my self-indulgence was praised. The art of writing had come to me only with great pain in high school, but the intervening years of letter-writing had made me often too facile. In undergraduate school, I studied under one who could, on one hearing, both recognize good writing and explain why it was good, a skill baffling to me and one which, I still feel, is essential for any good teacher.

In graduate school I hoped to fill this need—to learn to judge what is good writing and to distinguish its qualities. Perhaps this is an art which can only be caught, for, while some of my professors have exhibited it incidentally in their judgments and in their dissections of a student's poor writing, I have never known a course which concentrated on this one essential skill. I should like to. Though I did not find such a course, I had picked a good school, where the art of writing is understood and cherished. My own carelessness in writing was not tolerated. Practical education began when, in an effort to reduce a 26-page paper to the requested 20 pages, I jammed as many phrases, clauses and ideas as I could pile into each sentence, thereby "shortening" the paper, I hoped. Some of my unwieldy sentences, strung together by semi-colons and overworked commas, stretched over more than a page. Faulkner's longest sentences had little on mine except grace, coherency and intelligibility. This strange device—clauses and phrases jammed together—did indeed shorten the whole, for, when my indignant professor complained of "run-on sentences" and required a complete rewriting, the refurbished sentences added up to 29 pages. From high school on, writing had been my forte and I had become much too sure of my ability in it. Now I had discovered, not only that my writing was far from infallible, but that brevity could be carried to an extreme.

Another professor, an admirer of classic polished and balanced sentences, demonstrated the virtues of a moderate brevity. For the benefit of the whole class, he wrote on the blackboard one student's wordy and involved sentence full of unnecessary phrases and clauses. By substituting a simple verb or a noun for a phrase and by omitting the unnecessary, he reduced the sentence to one-fourth its original length and achieved force and clarity. Such a sentence as the following:

> While we often discover ourselves to be in great difficulty when we try to tell, in our reading of Plato's Dialogues, which are Socrates' own opinions and which are Plato's subsequent contributions to his master's thought, we may in general come to the conclusion that Plato developed a more consistent cosmology and metaphysics.

was reduced first to:

> While it is difficult, in reading Plato's Dialogues, to distinguish between Socrates' own opinions and Plato's development of them, Plato developed a more consistent cosmology and metaphysics.

and finally to:

> While, in Plato's Dialogues, Socrates' opinions cannot always be distinguished from his disciple's development of them, Plato developed a more consistent cosmology and metaphysics.

My faulty parallelism was also checked, and so my understanding of a good sentence grew.

The over-all structure of a paper was my main problem. Enlightenment began when a professor told me to read Aristotle's "Poetics," and the need of a beginning, middle and end to a paper became concrete to me. I had been warned months before by a fellow student that each of my papers must have one thesis, which I must choose and then prove to be true. I told him, and have since told various professors, that I will not start any paper with a predetermined conclusion. I must leave my mind free to come to any decision the evi-

dence seems to support in the course of writing the paper. Never do I know ahead what my conclusion will be. It is my ideal, in order to be as honest and unbiassed as possible, to have no preconceptions, and, if I do have a preconception, then I risk failure. For I think as I write, and each succeeding sentence makes me think a little harder. In a long paper, I must rethink the first part to make it at least reasonably consistent with the end, and the beginning I always write last. Perhaps partly for this reason, I was downgraded on one paper, and that professor and I tangled. He said I must have a point and prove it. I pointed out that, as he had just made clear, a historian with an idea to prove often distorts his material so that it may support his particular view. He assured me that my case and that of the historian were quite different, and that my writing would be dull. I remarked that many people considered the *New York Times* much duller than the *Daily News*. Did he want to descend to their level? My heat, I confess, was mostly due to a suspicion, which I will discuss shortly, that my grade was unfairly low. Our skirmish did not even slightly affect his subsequent courtesy to me, and I continued to mull over the conflict between a need for unified coherency and my need to remain unbiassed. This conflict was only recently resolved by a professor in my undergraduate school, who urged me to write first in my own way; to discover what conclusions, if any (and, if none, then that fact is in itself a conclusion) are valid; and, not until the conclusions are determined and written, finally to determine what the thesis may be and rewrite the whole paper, omitting everything irrelevant to the thesis and indicating in just what direction that which is relevant points, whether for or against the thesis. I am relieved to have my impasse so clarified.

Along with good writing, academic freedom is prized in this school. Just as the above disagreement in no way affected that professor's attitude towards me nor the grades he gave, again I felt the love of freedom when I tangled with another professor on the value of intuition. Like any woman, I feel the intuitive should not be inhibited by the merely rational. He, however, insisted on facts to prove whatever point might be made. Certainly I feel facts are essential as far as they go and his emphasis is healthy and necessary. I was afraid, though, that insistence upon concrete facts might mean that no subject which transcended the concrete could be discussed—no such subject as the warmth of an author's interest in his characters or the relative emotional insight of two works of art, such as *Paradise Lost* and the *Bible*. If such subjects, admittedly more difficult to approach, are eliminated, our most meaningful experiences go with them. This professor has no use for intuition unless it is completely verified by concrete proof. I trust intuition, and, when I told him so, he almost skipped with joy at being so contradicted. We agreed to disagree, each still proselyting. This graduate school is no treadmill, and the breath of liberty blows freshly.

Yet this English department has a serious flaw—prejudice against women graduate students. I was warned of this danger before I came, but, as a friend of some experience said, "You'll find that anywhere. After all, what do women do but take up space and then go off and get married?" Is it perhaps true that women, even those serious enough to want graduate school, are not as intensely motivated to such learning as men, who must earn their living by their education? For a man his earning power is his central contribution to the family, while a woman may be most winning if she camouflages or even suppresses whatever earning power she might have.

Certainly she does not have the man's practical motivation to an intensive training in any profession but one. So perhaps those who are prejudiced against women graduate students have a point. If, however, it be said that a woman should not be too educated, no matter how keen her interest and diligence, simply because she will not have a man's practical need for advanced learning, I appeal to Robert Frost's "Two Tramps in Mudtime." Those of us who feel our interest to be almost self-indulgent, even frivolous—even such of us have a right to that training which is our soul's delight. As automation frees more workers for longer hours of freedom, which will surely often include schooling, shall we deny them advanced education if they want it, just because they don't "need" it?

In this English department I have felt not only a skepticism that a woman may be sincerely dedicated to her studies but that she can be morally worthy of the honor of advanced studies. This doubt is not shared by all members of the department, but it is sufficiently widespread so that I do not think the departure of even the head, no dictator but a resourceful leader, would change the policy. From this skepticism, I believe, springs a reluctance to grade a woman too highly lest she become eligible to embark on too ambitious a program. I am in a poor position to judge whether my comparatively low marks are due to such practical consideration or merely to the higher standards of this school known for its high standards. But there is inconsistency in the marks, even when given by the same professor and certainly when given by different professors. At first I took the marks quite seriously, and they were a spur to further effort. If marks are too high, with no place to go but down, they become a burden of responsibility. An A is pleasant, but one of those "anaemic" B's (as the professor most addicted to so honoring me termed them) may provide an additional incentive. This spur remains in force as long as the grades are taken seriously, but I confess to a much less healthy anger when I began to suspect their validity. If grades are tampered with too frequently, they arouse nothing but contempt, and an important tool of the teacher's profession is blunted. That men with such a Machiavellian attitude towards grades also question female honesty and integrity is not surprising, considering that we often judge others by ourselves. These professors, in their zeal to protect the high standards of their department—indeed one of the best in the nation—compromise their own integrity and perhaps so disable themselves from seeing the honesty that is in woman.

On the whole, however, this has been a year I would not give up. Irritated, even bitter, as I may sometimes have felt over injustice, my resentment melted as I sat in class beneath the spell of one who brought out the music and meaning of poetry or prose, an author's overall position in history, his meaning to us today, and the ways he can teach us to improve our own writing or to see life more roundly. This whole year has added immensely to my understanding of what is good writing, and, as a teacher, I hope to explain more clearly therefore. If I never earn much money, I will nevertheless, as I resolved at seven, be much better able to "do things"—those things which I choose voluntarily for the joy they bring—because of my training under good teachers.

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"Consider the program as a package . . ."

I THOUGHT that literature was about life, but in graduate school I found it was about theme, plot, structure, and symbol. Including the final assignment I have just taken from my typewriter, I can count on the fingers of one hand the meaningful learning experiences I had in two years of graduate school.

Seldom did I get the opportunity to discuss or write about literature as a personal experience. Students and faculty understood that one does not ask about the impact of Raskolnikov's terror, the student's reaction to Melville's value, Samuel Butler's picture of the authoritarian father in terms of one's own experience with authority, or the sympathy aroused by Dickens' picture of the child's life. In an English program there should be a place for an honest evaluation of how literature affects the student. If not, literature has become a victim of the Mechanical Age and can no longer be discussed as an enrichment of the reader's life and an enlargement of his vision. When this occurs, the graduate program in English is dead and English majors will march in Huxleyan lockstep, book in hand, reading and responding like machines.

Two years of graduate school made me feel that the study of literature is atrophying. I expected that a graduate program in English would provide me with both a greater number and variety of experiences than had been previously offered. It did not. Many of the pallid assignments from the undergraduate level were increased by one-third and given to me again.

I want to go to an author, book, or character as I go to a friend. Each of these displays a set of values that throw light on how men live, how much life has given or taken from them, and what gain or loss meant to them. Since everyone's comprehension of the human condition is limited by his individual life span, the most valid goal in reading another man's interpretation of experience seems to be the addition to one's own realization of life. Though this benefit is obvious, its significance makes it too important to take for granted. Sophistication in technical intricacies supports a feeling of superiority, but serves as a poor tool for prying open the shell covering the life-stuff.

Emphasis on formal proficiency to the extent of dehumanizing the content of literature dulls the sensitivity of a reader's response. The way an author perceives and organizes his world tells me something about him as a human being. This knowledge functions more usefully for me as a whole person than knowing where his book falls in the mainstream of American or English literature. Even more important than what an author tells about himself is what an author tells me about myself as I evaluate what his world had done to mine. If such evaluation took place while I was in graduate school, and it did, it occurred in spite of the classrooms and the assignments.

I spent two years in English classes doing tasks that lost their vitality from destructive repetition. I was not asked to deal with an experience, but with the

superficialities of how and why the experience came to be expressed in the manner that it was. I was not participating in an experience, I was watching it, and the observation process gave off the sterile odor of the clinic. A graduate program should not restrict its members from taking part in the life behind the written word, but it does if the assignments do not include an examination of the value a book has for its reader, which, after all, is the only important value. Reading literature with such a commitment requires some independence, some time for exploration into literature both harmonious and disagreeable to the reader's world view. Unfortunately, teachers seldom recognized the need; much less did they encourage its satisfaction.

In one American literature class I was able to read freely and to write about the impact the literature had on me. During that semester I read more novels than I had ever read for any single course. Having finished the reading, I wrote a paper on the hero in American fiction. I described heroes in personal terms, their strengths and weaknesses as human beings, their hopes and failures, and their morality. Having gained a sense of what life meant to them, I could integrate their experience into mine. Only at this point did the considerations of theme, plot, character, structure, style, etc., become important as a means of integrating the experience. It was here that I realized that the author's effectiveness might depend on the beauty of expression or on exactness of realistic reproduction, but that the effectiveness should be responded to before an analysis of the devices. In this context I was able to discuss with some excitement and animation how poor characterization could restrict a writer's statement and the ways in which thematic material made richer the milieu of a book. Assignments allowing independence in approach serve not only to increase the depth of my knowledge about literature, but challenge me to develop values beyond the narrow range of my existence.

I hasten, however, to suggest that the good teacher had more to offer than independent study. There should be a structure to the knowledge obtained through independent work, because the elements of literature must be ordered to be seen in greater dimension. Helping the student to order this knowledge is the job of the good English teacher, who remembers that the techniques of order must be used to heighten the reading experience. The teacher should not ask the student to write about the technical aspects of literature without allowing the student to integrate them with his own statement. Why cannot the teacher ask, What did the story mean to me? Was the story real? Did it correspond with any meaning in my own life experience? Such questions should be part of the graduate experience in English. Had my teachers cared enough about their subject to be concerned with my reaction, they might have elicited some sparks of enthusiasm to light my dark dissertations on the technical reasons a book did or did not hold together.

If I dislike a book, I should be able to discuss it in light of my failure to identify with the author's values, then praise or damn it on the basis of the author's craftsmanship. When a student of literature can say that he dislikes a book such as *Moll Flanders* because he dislikes being in a fictional world that has a repulsive moral climate, he has been given encouragement toward a total involvement with literature. With this approach, DeFoe's skill in the characterization of Moll, which gives her tremendous vitality, can be appreciated, but only as secondary as to his failure to establish any positive moral code. In my

eyes Moll's unwholesome amorality determines the nature of the book. I'm sure that the professor who insists his students should admire Moll would feel only disgust for her dishonesty if she sat in his literature class. Yet I never could feel entirely free to declare that Moll stands for a dishonesty I could not tolerate, even while admitting that DeFoe's skill had made me live in her world. The pseudo-assignments concentrate on superficialities and, therefore, elicit superficial responses, as can be seen by student attempts to plagiarise, which should be unthinkable to any graduate English student. People whose emotional and intellectual energies are directed toward a meaningful relationship with literature feel no need to cheat.

However, some benefit accrued from all the assigned writing. Because every art form has inherent restrictions, the constant use of the essay form restricts modes of expression of ideas for a class assignment, and does not allow for creative exploration. But it is helpful in that such a form provides the graduate student with a constant reminder of what he l e a r n e d in undergraduate school, and is a means of frictionless contact with his instructor.

The emphasis on the superficial has given the superficial a place of prominence in graduate study. What one learns about writing is self-taught. The mechanics of the graduate school direct the instructor's remarks toward a justification of the grade rather than serve as a guide to clearer expression. The product of graduate school would be a more capable writer if both teacher and student were to direct their energies to make each student paper as good as possible; instead the student must spend his time discovering how to please the instructor. Instead of a slap in the face or a pat on the back, why not an opportunity to rewrite?

For me the price of getting a degree in the area of my choosing in order to teach literature to others has been frustration, anxiety, and general discomfort. The discouragement grew, unrelieved by conversations with instructors who told me to consider the program as a package, that my experience was not different from theirs, and it at least got me what I wanted—the job of teaching English. I am sorry that I cannot in conscience give hope to those whom I know still in graduate school that they are faced with anything more than an obstacle course.

As a graduate student involved with many bright faculty and students from whom I might have benefitted even more, I regret that class discussions and written assignments rooted in life experience of the personal kind happened so few times they became a luxury. The faculty had apparently removed themselves to the esoteric realm of art for art's sake, where literature is refined to the point of brittleness. There is hope, however, for the English program. Strong demands from the total personality break this brittle overlay and persist through to the enduring life-stuff of a literary masterpiece.

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"One wins a Ph.D. by being a drudge."

ONE OF THE TWO PROFESSORS most responsible for my decision to undertake graduate study in English once remarked to a class of graduate students that in the new student union then swelling up through the trees, a "lounge" for graduate students should be set aside by the authorities. The lounge, he timidly proposed, should be lined with shelves on which would rest only one publication—a complete file of all issues of *PMLA*. He put forth this notion with seriousness, and with proper and sincere solemnity we nodded our wise approval. Now I realize that his vision could be matched only by Genet.

At that time (1957), however, I was a "knowing" M. A. candidate. I had plunged into the work with the zeal of a madman (who else could lounge with 75 years of that esteemed publication surrounding him?); I had the "inside" view, I was pursuing knowledge, I was dedicated to the cause.

The M. A. then still had its integrity, at least at my institution. The practice of granting it freely as a sop to help lure one into Ph.D. work had not been devised. I studied in numerous areas in a random sequence, wrote a 129-page thesis on a relatively unexplored subject, passed a language exam, underwent an oral, received my degree and then began considering doctoral efforts.

It is not the M. A. work that I criticize here. I needed the work to complete my formal education because so many undergraduate semesters were lost to completing my high school education. But I emphasize that it was the terminal point in my education.

Not in formal course work, however, for I dutifully trudged on to another university and the doctorate.

By this time, I was in need of funds, and I therefore accepted a teaching fellowship, thus becoming the schizophrenic doctoral candidate: half teacher, half student. This insidious position, invented by impoverished universities that are willing to sacrifice students in order to stretch the dollar while paying administrators fancy wages, deserves more condemnation than the term "slave labor" contains, for it is not only a means to procure cheap teachers for freshmen and sophomore courses; it deprives the student who should be preparing to be a teacher of the leisure and concentration required for sound advanced study. At work full time on nothing, scurrying to classes in which he finds himself on opposite sides of the lectern, unable to feel in full command of his own students, dissociated from the general faculty, grading papers, writing papers, he has no solid identity.

The palliative that pinched faculties use to excuse this buck private position is that the young teacher can learn how to teach by being subordinated to a course chairman while yet studying—"practical experience" is the term. From my association with six universities, I would say that the person who fills this company sergeant post is seldom (never, in my experience) a stimulating teacher himself. He is usually kind but uninspired, thorough but ridiculously fussy about unimportant details ("Have you entered all the names in the grade book yet?"), and always officious. Unknow-

ingly whittling away at the teacher-student's enthusiasm, he is not the model to inspire and vitalize. I suspect that this semi-administrative position attracts this kind of person. It offers a special title, a chance to govern, and yet entails little responsibility or imaginative work.

Nor can I see the need to deprive graduate student-teachers (if we must have them) the right to a voice—small but audible—in departmental policy. One of the tenets of the university, perhaps now only apparitional, is that standardization of courses and professors does not increase but hinders knowledge. You generally do not remember great courses but great teachers and great moments with them, those times when you responded with your being to theirs. To teach, one must select his material and his approach with care, and a main consideration is what *he,* not other members of the department, can do with it for his students.

The teacher-student, however, is handed a series of books and a syllabus, and finds himself under the direction of a man he does not care to emulate. He attends a weekly meeting at which questions about mechanics are discussed but no issues, no ideas, no literature, and then with dampened spirit he tramps off to grade themes on a subject he did not approve of.

The creation of the teaching fellowship or graduate assistantship, however, is not my main criticism deriving from my encounter with doctoral studies; in spite of the difficulties it creates, I think that a person can still learn—less well, less enjoyable, but nevertheless learn. The real problem is what he is forced to learn, or rather the barriers thrown in his path. "Run the obstacle course, and we'll give you the right to teach".

For me, like others, the requirements called for sitting in prescribed classes for several years, including one in linguistics, one in the history of the language, and one in Anglo-Saxon, taking a special written examination in these three subjects beyond the mid-terms and finals in each, passing exams in French and German, enduring a two-hour oral (one on "English literature," one on a work in my field), and writing a lengthy dissertation to the pleasure of a committee.

My quarrel with doctoral work rests on the premise that it largely entails work irrelevant to the education of a good teacher and scholar; I did not have this insight until after I had spent nearly a year in the program, and I have felt it has been soundly confirmed since by my teaching experience. I also discovered that some of the requirements that could be useful are only paper constructions used to maintain a facade of industry and respectability in the university world.

No doubt French and German are helpful to the scholar, for instance. But how many Ph. D's can read either language even though they have passed the exams? I know that one crams and passes and, except for a wish that one had the real thing, there's the end of it. And it's no secret to any one. That means the university is retaining what amounts to a nuisance requirement. Either the graduate school should mean what it says or withdraw it. It is pretension to do otherwise.

I faced the same useless demand with linguistics and the history of the language. Many hours had to be allotted to memorizing all the sound changes in English from the beginning to the present day as well as the linguistic symbols, et. al., to pass *five* different examinations all given by the same instructor. Needless to say, I forgot the information immediately after each exam and had to relearn it for the next one. Would that today I could quiz every student who has been subjected to this torture

to see how much each has retained—and used. How much more worthwhile if I had been exposed to the concepts and phenomena, given a basic understanding in order that I might realize what kind of history our language has had and what is going on in linguistics today. That information I would retain and use. Instead I was racked with all the specifics and no generalizations, while the obvious need is for the generalizations with some examples.

Iconoclastically I must add that a semester or year's study of Anglo-Saxon is not vital to many non-Anglo-Saxon teachers and scholars. Interesting, yes. But so are many subjects. I should say that two weeks introduction to this subject is all that is practical. Life is too brief; I feel that a university should assist one in realizing what his individual potential is and then should help provide the means to achieve it, not waste his time or legislate his values. A thorough study of Anglo-Saxon is not the way to self-fulfillment for every graduate student in English.

The course work I found unsatisfying. I had sat many years in classes and now I had students sitting before me. I felt that I should now be out *studying* and preparing, not listening. I wanted to read Milton and scholars on Milton and be queried individually by my professor, not listen to him ramble on for forty-five hours spread over fifteen weeks, interrupted now and again with naive question by grade school teachers taking our course to earn a salary increment. Such is not the atmosphere for scholarship. In fact I seldom saw any difference in my graduate classes from my undergraduate classes except that in the former the papers were longer.

I do not condemn the dissertation; it provides opportunity for individual work that must be defended. Nevertheless, no one has delineated to my satisfaction its worth to every future professor. I might add that I have decided that in my own case, should I ever expend such an effort, I will try my hand at writing on a subject that interests me and to my own satisfaction. Then I will hope to publish it. I know too many depressed young people worrying out a year or two or three in an endeavor to produce 200 pages on a useless and meaningless and boring subject and finding it difficult to satisfy their inquisitors. They feel like Shaw's Joan of Arc: be burned at the stake or recant and spend your life in a dungeon.

It is just such an option that chokes the enthusiasm of graduate students, and killed my own. Treated like freshmen, we are made to abide regular, interminable lectures, the standard examinations, papers on rehashed subjects and of required lengths; we must forego our current intellectual interests to take up less relevant ones; we must memorize, repeat, regurgitate. And all this culminates in massive dissertations of varying worth. (How many are ever read except by subsequent candidates working over related material?) One wins a Ph.D. by being a drudge.

A friend of mine recently took his written comprehensives for the degree and failed on one question, which means that he must take the full two days' worth over again even though he did well on the others. He has already taught at an outstanding university for three years. Next year he is moving to an even better one in the East. For graduate study he received the most prestigious scholarship this English department offers. He has published in *Modern Philology* and in the apex, the crown jewel, *PMLA*. As a teacher he is praised from all sides, and he is respected and admired by his colleagues. Furthermore, the professor who failed his answer on the exam admitted the question was singularly arbitrary and penitently declared he would not use it

again. He then proceeded to ask the student to substitute in lecturing on the modern novel the next day for an assistant professor in the department who was ill.

This anecdote, told accurately and without exaggeration, confirms my own experience with the Ph.D. requirements. Here is a person who *already* has accomplished what the Ph.D. is supposed to help prepare for. Yet he has been rejected, at least temporarily, for the degree. What more startling proof of its irrelevance?

And even more astounding is the comment that the form of publication of this collection of articles makes on the people in control of the universities. These testimonies must be published anonymously because many of those dedicated, impartial scholars, fearlessly pursuing truth together, would hold them against us.

+case-history 6

"The graduate school obstructed the exchange of ideas."

AFTER TWO AND ONE HALF YEARS of graduate school, I quit. I stayed with it long enough to get an M.A. But during the year of work for a Ph.D., I realized that the graduate school as an institution actually obstructed the exchange of ideas. So I left.

Graduate school, I have come to believe, should be a place where people who are involved in educating themselves can come together and exchange ideas, information, opinions, stimulation, encouragement, and the excitement of discovery. If this dialogue is officially promoted or at least is *permitted* to exist, all the rest of the graduate school could be absent or ineffective and there would remain a valuable learning experience. Without this dialogue, all the other components of the graduate school —the classes, reading lists, research assignments, lectures, papers, etc.—make up no more than an institutional shell, of only marginal value.

I plan to return to graduate school, in spite of my feeling that it is, by and large, a failure. I will return because the completion of a doctor's degree (whatever lies behind it) is now a necessity for a teaching career. But I will return with more dread than eagerness. Dread, because I know that a graduate school is likely to hinder one's scholarly pursuits. *Exactly* what it is about graduate school that hinders, I am not certain I can explain rationally and adequately; it is something in the atmosphere. But certain memories, or images, arise when I think about graduate school. They embody the persistent, negative feelings I have about graduate school:

I see myself late in the afternoon on a day when I have read only a few chapters of a supplementary book or gone over a meaningless list of German vocabulary words five or six times, or have taken notes on two "critical" articles, the point and utility of which I am not convinced. It is late in the day and I have done only a few things, learned little, and completed nothing. All is in flux. I feel somehow disconnected from the university and have to keep reminding myself that I am a grad-

uate student, duly enrolled. My day is passing without celebration or genuine accomplishment. I keep asking myself what satisfaction is possible when one prepares for class discussions that somehow never take place, and when one is preparing for a final examination that can be passed without ever once attending the class? I am drinking my seventh cup of black instant coffee in large, joyless gulps. In an hour, my wife will be home from the job she has taken to support my efforts. I must try to accomplish *something* for her sake; I am filled with guilt. Perhaps I will continue to read. Perhaps I will take some more notes. Perhaps I will continue to gaze out the window and will continue to ponder our graduate school situation. I experience a writhing ennui. I am trying to stay awake.

Or I see myself in a class. I settle onto my usual desk-chair, identifying it by a writing surface scarred and rutted by fraternity insignia. I nod at the semi-stranger on my left. She sits there every class period and our relationship is defined by the placement of the chairs and delimited by an occasional smile or nod. We never talk to each other. I am on more intimate terms with the student on my right; we sometimes exchange a few words. Once we walked to another building together, discussing parts of a lecture we had just heard.

The room is filled with the chatter of young girls under bouffant hair-dos. It is not clear to me what they are all doing in what is supposed to be a *graduate* course in nineteenth-century American literature. There must be forty or fifty of them, occupying solidly the front five rows of the lecture hall. They seem to divide their time between adjusting the components of their appearance and huddling over their notebooks, scrupulously transcribing the lecture of the day into clean, well-spaced notes. I watch their faces during the lecture and there appears only rarely anything like interest in the words of the lecturer. The infrequent questions they ask are frivolous, or so elementary as to be an insult to the lecturer. No part of the chatter that drifts back from the front five rows asserts an interest in or even an awareness of the subject of each day's lecture. I amuse myself by imagining how fruitful the class might be if the enrollment were held down to those interested in nineteenth-century American literature.

I crouch in the back of the room, straining to catch some enlightening snatch of the lecture. It is about Walt Whitman. I am sweating slightly and am aware of some irony in connection with words on Whitman in this setting and among these people. I keep asking myself why they all come here. What do they mean to do here? I am interested in Whitman's life and writing and I read his work at home. The words sent out by the lecturer on Whitman reach me only rarely; it is almost as if they are weighed down in the warmth, stifled by the front five rows of teased hair and cashmere, sterilized in being captured verbatim by the fifty pens moving in unison.

Or I see myself writing a paper. The time is always short under a quarter system; instead of a problem presenting itself naturally out of the course matter, I must decide on some likely-sounding subject well in advance of any real knowledge of that subject. I have arrived at that point where the basic research is done. I have pulled together my materials and have found that: (a) there is no real problem. The thesis on which I have been laboring is one that has a transparently obvious answer. Or: (b) there may be a problem here all right, but it is not the one I had to start with; it is another, far more interesting and challenging thesis that has partially emerged from the materials I gathered for my original, a priori thesis. Natur-

third advisor of the year (the first two were shot from under me by sabbaticals).

"Have you selected your courses?" he inquires.

"Yes and no," say I, "since I have some in mind, as indicated on the sheet, but . . ." A mistake. Far too complicated and ambiguous an answer, and I should have known it.

"What do you mean?" he demands. You have four courses picked out and listed. It all looks okay from here."

"Yes, but those are tentative, you see," I point out. "I mean those are all right, but I want to get into American literature right away and I don't know which level, 300, 400, 500, or 600 courses I should be taking now, at this stage of things. It's not in the catalog," I add lamely.

Dr. Aloof takes a long look at the half-dozen or so lines filled in on my pink copy. "Not 600," he declares. "But wait, do you have your M.A.?"

"Yes sir."

"Well then, not so many 300's either. Unless you need them for background."

"I don't know sir. No one ever told me which ones I will need and which ones I won't need, what the requirements are, that is."

"Stick to the 400 or 500 level. 'Course the 500 seminars are pretty well filled, so . . ."

"Yes sir." He does not add that the 300 and 400 courses are pretty well filled with undergraduates, to the measure of about 85 to 140 per class.

Then, just as I am about to explain that I would really like to get into some American literature seminars and get away from the large, undergraduate-infested "graduate" courses, Dr. Aloof harrumphs a couple of times and sneaks his signature onto the bottom of my pink copy.

He smiles benignly at me while wafting my registration form to dry the ink. He extends it to me across his desk. It is now *official*.

"Now then, no problems, eh? The courses you have selected look fine. Don't worry about the level. You can work that out can't you? After all, when you get to graduate school you have to make these decisions."

"Yes sir, but . . ."

"You'll get into the seminars soon enough. You've got some good lecturers there." He points at my pink form with a pink finger. "And these courses are all good background for your area of interest, now aren't they?"

"Well, sir, I . . ."

He puts away his pen and rolls back from the desk. My advisement is completed. "What was it again, Victorian poets?"

"Uh, no sir." I get up to leave. At least I got his signature. (It is supposed to indicate to The Administration enlightened aid and counsel. They probably don't believe it either.)

"'S awright. Anytime you got a question or a problem, why just drop in. That's what your advisor is here for."

"Yes sir, yes sir." I back, nodding, from the room and as I gain the outer office I almost bump into another graduate student. He is sweating and smoking, waiting to be advised on his intellectual life for the next quarter. I dodge past the secretary and out of the building into the hazy violet winter afternoon.

One last image seems always to be present when I begin dwelling on my graduate school experiences: I emerge from an informative and thought-provoking lecture on the Transcendentalists. Following me, rushing through the crowd of next-hour students filling the doors and aisles, is a graduate school acquaintance (one has no time really to make friends) named Jerry. He is working on a paper on Thoreau's political views, or the political implications of Thoreau's philosophy, or something like

that. We stand together in the vestibule, pulling on caps, gloves, assorted mufflers, etc., insulating ourselves against the harshness of winter in the Northern plains states.

"What about that remark about 'Slavery in Massachusetts'?" Jerry shouts as we step out into a frigid, gritty wind. I am unable to answer for a moment.

"I don't know. It seemed to me that Dr. Hawville was criticising an implied, potential anarchism, or something."

"I thought you'd pick that up," Jerry affirms. "Too bad there wasn't time for questions. Geez, it's cold!"

"Yes, I thought you'd want to say something about that. What a wind!"

"I think he is wrong about it. I've been working in that area and I think the order is there. Where are you going now?"

"Home, I guess. Anywhere to get out of this wind. Are you going to deal with that in your paper?"

"I thought I'd go to the library and eat my lunch." Jerry's face is reddening with the cold wind. "You should see this one study I've picked up. It concentrates on 'Civil Disobedience' but has implications for all the political essays."

"Why don't you come on over to my place for lunch? I'd like to see what you've got and show you the paper I did on Thoreau a couple of years ago."

Jerry shakes his head. "I can't do that. Don't forget I live clear over the other direction. It'd mean five or six miles walking in this cold to get back. My ears'd fall off. I'd like to see the paper and discuss some of this with you though. Maybe we could get together someplace."

"How about the library?"

"No talking, except on those marble benches and those are always filled with kids out there to smoke."

"How about the student union?"

"Are you kidding? About ten thousand people there eating lunch. They're all over the place, with paper bags and things. All you can hear is ping-pong and rock and roll from the juke."

"Well, there must be some place."

"Yeah, I've got to get out of this wind. What about that coffee house on Fourth Street?"

"The one with the sculpture in the window? Not a chance. They hiss you if you say a word while this girl is playing the guitar. It's no good, besides I'm broke."

"What about a classroom?"

"I don't think so. Long as I've been here, they're filled until four o'clock and then locked up after that. Prevents vandalism."

"Yeah? Well I don't know anyplace then. Only place it's quiet is the infirmary. Why don't you just bring the paper along to Wednesday's class and you can show it to me while we stand in the hall afterwards."

"Okay, I'll do that."

"Geez, it's cold."

"It sure is!"

These images come to mind when I consider graduate school. But I will return for one more try, not at better preparing myself as a teacher (because if I am a better teacher now, that is only a happy, accidental side effect of the university's policy of hiring teaching assistants as cheap labor), not at becoming a more mature scholar, but only at the getting of a doctor's degree. I can look forward to graduate school only as a kind of rite of passage, an endurance trial that must be undertaken if I am ever to be accepted as an adult member of the Academic tribe.

+case-history 7

"an interruption rather than a preparation . . ."

THE STUDENTS of the first two freshman composition sections I ever taught were fifty martyrs.

After completing Ph.D. course work at a vast university in a great city, I signed on as an English instructor at a first-rank engineering school. Although I was a fully accredited new critic, armed with the techniques of explicating the ironic implications of even typographical errors, instead of being assigned four sections of twentieth century critical method, I had to face and teach two sections of freshman composition six hours each week for forty weeks.

Since I attended a graduate school using very few graduate assistants, I had received no training, either direct or indirect, in teaching a subject I was expected to teach half-time. I grasped at literary straws, explicating *ad nauseam* the Conradian ambivalences of *Victory* and the sociological implications of Huck Finn. Of course my students wrote—and I read—weekly (weakly?) themes. But since the majority of my students were neither perceptive Marlowes nor even semi-literate Hucks, what I talked about in class and what they wrote about in dorm rooms were separate.

Fortunately, the engineering school I was teaching in had set up a "cram course" for new instructors in composition teaching in an effort to fill the vacuum left by the graduate schools. But the cram course met only an hour a week and was led by an already overburdened senior professor who would assign composition topics for our classes, exhort us to teach writing and communication rather than literature, then hastily depart. What teaching writing, what teaching communication really meant was usually undefined, left up to us.

As a result I stumbled through my first year teaching less composition than literature, learning far more than my students about composition, but at the same time cheating them because I didn't—couldn't—learn *and* transmit my perceptions instantaneously. Although by the September of my second teaching year I felt as confident about teaching composition as about teaching literature—by then I knew where I was going, knew what needed to be done with amateur writers—my first year students, the fifty martyrs, had been cheated by the failure of my graduate school to take any responsibility whatever in helping me teach effectively a course that will probably occupy one-half of my professional career. I had spent hundreds of hours learning to read *Beowulf*, but not ten minutes with a freshman theme.

Since most graduate school training in English is exclusively—almost snobbishly—literary, how might these schools better prepare their students to teach composition? An obvious first answer would be for graduate professors to reduce or modify the usual classroom slams and jokes. ("You'll probably start by teaching four sections of the freshman composition curse.") against the whole idea of freshman composition. Graduate students far too often imitate the cynicism of their professors by entering their first jobs already soured on freshman composition and expecting to be bored by the course. They are.

A more positive way of preparing students to teach composition would be for graduate professors to assign term papers that introduce the concept of audience. (For a class of high school seniors, discuss the humor in *Gulliver's Travels*. How would you teach "To His Coy Mistress" to a class of college sophomores?) Only once in graduate school did a professor of mine—who was then editor of a leading scholarly journal—assign a paper that was to be written for any audience than the scholarly audience of one that smoked a pipe behind the front lectern. But in writing this single paper aimed at a class of college sophomores, I began to get some glimmering of what it really meant to be a teacher.

Further, graduate professors might comment more on their students' prose styles instead of merely correcting M. L.A. style sheet mechanics or making vague remarks on the adequacy of the research or the worth of the ideas. And some papers come back with only such two word annotations as: "Good work" or "Not bad."

Intensive analysis of an author's prose style would also be excellent training for the day when Joe Brown's, rather than Thomas Browne's, prose style needs to be anatomized and analyzed, with its faults and virtues pointed out in clear, specific comments. For all the intensive analysis of poetry practiced in the academies, it's surprising how little analysis of prose takes place. Never once in graduate school did a professor of mine explicate a prose paragraph. At most, some mention was made of one writer's "remarkable prose rhythms" or another's "poetic prose" before turning to other matters. Yet how beneficial this would have been to any embryonic composition teacher.

At the very least, graduate professors could indulge themselves in occasional anecdotes on their own experiences teaching composition, or the kinds of problems they first encountered back then, or the common student writing problems they hear about in faculty banter. Graduate schools might even give their students insight into some of the psychological problems freshmen face. When one of my friends once told me a student of his had been talking of suicide, I said, "Of course you sent him to the school psychiatrist." "No," he replied, "I would never send anyone under any circumstances to a psychiatrist." Depression, mental breakdown, even suicide is not rare in college, and—given the peculiarly intimate nature of freshman composition—the English teacher may be the only faculty member even to suspect something is wrong. I'm not advocating a three credit course in Psychological Problems of Freshmen, but perhaps an informal talk by the school psychologist, with a short reading list including articles like Dr. James A. Paulsen's "College Students in Trouble" (*Atlantic*, July, 1964) or Lionel Trilling's short story "Of This Time, Of That Place" would alert teachers to students needing more than academic help. But the present assumption in most graduate schools seems to be that their students would go directly into library carrels ringed by stacks of scholarly periodicals and will only be heard from when they belch forth a book or article (to be duly catalogued in the surrounding periodicals) while having no contact with any human being later than Hart Crane.

This literary exclusiveness has another debilitating influence on undergraduate teaching even outside of composition: the literature studied in graduate school is almost exclusively British and American. Although undergraduate world literature courses become more and more prominent (often replacing the impossible survey), inter-departmental courses taught in translation at the graduate level are both rare and suspect. Neverthe-

less, in my second year of teaching I was given a world literature course that included Sophocles, Ibsen, Camus, Mann, and Voltaire as well as Shakespeare and Chaucer. Fortunately my undergraduate training in comparative literature had been excellent, so that twenty-five further martyrs were not added to my charnel listing.

To remedy this extreme literary parochialism of graduate school, more attention could be paid to the foreign language reading examinations. Their ostensible purpose—to enable the student to read scholarship in German or French—will soon be obsolete: computer translation will probably be commonplace within two decades. Were the foreign language exams to be treated as devices for encouraging the close reading and analysis of foreign *literature,* then the graduate student would become a far better teacher of world literature. As it stands now, Spanish and Italian are scandalously cold-shouldered out of the hallowed trinity of Latin, French, and German. To make the foreign language examination part of the student's literary training, why not asign him the task of translating and defending his translation of a sonnet by Rilke, or a prose poem by Baudelaire, or a vignette by Jiménez? For professors to encourage comparative studies of Swift and Voltaire, Camus and Hemingway, or Williams and Ionesco would certainly freshen the sometimes stifling air of graduate school, with its rigidly compartmentalized century courses in separate languages.

But the encroachments of the Educational Testing Service, already offering a standardized foreign language examination, will probably make the foreign language requirement even more sterile than it is now.

Perhaps the best solution to this problem of parochialism might be to unify English and the foreign languages into a graduate department of literature. After all, the themes and concerns that bind Dostoievski and Shakespeare together are of far more importance than the linguistic fact that they happened to express themselves in different languages by historic accident. I once asked the head of our German department why we weren't in a common department of literature. He said, "Well, you know the French and Spanish teachers fought each other so hard at one western college that they split the romance language department into French and Spanish departments." So, to maintain internal peace and departmental stability, the unity of literature as a discipline is sacrificed to a departmental organization that—a century ago—saw literature as a branch of history and philology.

Indeed, the very narrowing process of graduate study may only constrict the undergraduate teacher, stressing as it does exclusiveness rather than inclusiveness. I have found successful undergraduate teaching to be largely the drawing of a series of analogies from the student's world and relating them to the remoter world of literature. Only after a series of relationships is made between the world the student knows and the world the novel or poem describes, will most students show much interest in formal structure. Since most of our students' aesthetic experience now comes from the mass media, the exclusively literary nature of graduate study inhibits the making of these useful analogies. No commentator I know, for example, points out the similarities in tone and plot technique between *Candide* and the animated Tom and Jerry cartoon. Excellent comparative media studies such as George Bluestone's *Novel into Film* are still as rare as they are valuable.

All of us know an English teacher who "won't have" a TV in his house. Yet by its snobbish exclusiveness, grad-

uate study has done little to dispel this attitude, and far more to encourage it.

The one window through which fresh air does ventilate the graduate schools is linguistics, where required courses should do away with a great amount of the linguistic naiveté literature professors pass on to their graduate students, such as:

Item: The full professor of German who sent back Webster's Three and hunted up a mint copy of Webster's Two. (How unfortunate for him that Webster's One is wholly out of print.)

Item: The English department head of a prestigious Ivy graduate school who said: "A whole generation of graduate students has been mispronouncing that word. I want you to learn the correct pronunciation."

Item: The American literature professor who wondered out loud why Melville, in his travels, didn't learn one of the Polynesian languages, because they are primitive and therefore simpler.

Item: The poet-professor who decried a Mississippi dialect as "aesthetically reprehensible."

But aside from work in linguistics, graduate study seems to me far too much a process of time-serving and hurdle-crossing, jumping on too small a track. Now that I've finished course work and am struggling to prepare adequately for orals while at the same time getting enough background on my own so as not to cheat the students I'm paid to teach, I too often see the whole struggle for the Ph.D. as an interruption of rather than a preparation for a career.

+ case-history 8

"I was regarded as an adolescent . . ."

"I WANT TO COME HOME!" I heard myself sobbing to my family over the phone. Where was I—camp? boarding school? My age—seven? eleven? No, I had just completed my first three weeks as a doctoral candidate in English; I was thirty-one years old; and the only other time in my life I had wept from sheer dismay and disbelief was the afternoon I lost a rigged election in high school.

Clearly I did not go home, or I would not be writing this history. But in retrospect the phone call became Major Revelation Number One: life as a doctoral candidate not only permits but often sponsors regression.

Just what had happened in only three weeks to return me to adolescence, if not to outright childhood? Quite simply, I discovered, in a number of ways I shall recount, that as a doctoral candidate I was regarded as an adolescent. I possessed neither status nor autonomy (except when the institution needed me, as, for example, a grader of exams or a section man. For the length of the need —and not one moment longer—I stayed a colleague). And after roleplaying for a number of years, as snowingly as most citizens, that I was an adult, to lose the deciding vote in my own destiny came as an ugly shock. Psychiatrists such as Erik Erikson say that in all of us lives the child we once were, with his sense of smallness, impotence, and rage at his inability to control his environment.

Within a short time, the studious denial of status to this doctoral candidate had brought that child screamingly alive.

Not only my own behavior shocked; even more shocking was that of my fellow candidates whom I met at a department reception—the second, third, and eighth year men. Of what did they terribly remind me? At first I could not recall. I only knew that by all my tests of joy and juice they had lost more of the important senses that distinguish the living from the dead: a sense of humor; a sense of the urgency of time; a sense of independence; a sense of self, which is requisite to a sense of others. They were grim and sluggish and leaning and childish and selfish. Then I remembered where I had last seen a group as diffident. It had been in a psych lab; a friend had been conducting an experiment with a group of white rats in which they had been systematically frustrated until they no longer wanted to learn. In behavioral terms, they embodied that phenomenon called extinction. It was when I realized that a school was acting as an instrument of extinction and that students could become as daunted as rats that I ran for the phone and family.

An initial discounter: before making graduate school the total scapegoat, I should register my belief that most of us do not begin a doctorate in an Original State of Maturity, Nobility, and Grace. Especially those of us who gyre directly from bachelor's to master's to doctor's to Carnegie's clearly exhibit some inability to leave the academic womb, with our success as minds often compensatory for our failures as whole persons. But I am speaking in this history chiefly of the students who have spent time elsewhere teaching or doing some other form of work. What happens in graduate life to thrust *us* back into childhood? Here is a brief history of what I trust was an unintentional experiment in regression and extinction.

I began life as a doctoral candidate conventionally enough by selecting the courses I wanted to take, in my innocence reading the graduate catalogue literally. (Now I know that my pre-graduate standards of what constitute imaginative literature and what literal were askew. College catalogues are works of fiction, to be read imaginatively; to be read literally on the other hand are such descriptions of graduate-school actuality as Franz Kafka's *The Castle,* much of Hardy and Camus, and all of *Alice in Wonderland.*)

To return to the courses: in their full-blossoming descriptions they were things of beauty: three seminars—in Keats, American Romanticism, and Modern Poetry—and a reading course in James with one of his most tender delineators. And with only two straightforward steps they would be mine: I needed to get the permission of each instructor, and I needed to get the permission of my adviser, whom I had not yet met. At the doors of all three seminars I found myself shoulder-to-shoulder, Sorbonne-like, with forty to fifty of my compeers. For each seminar, the professor announced he would accept only fifteen students, chosen on the basis of seniority. First-year candidates, move on. The James' man looked up from his Leon Edel and said, "You can't be serious."

I found myself instead in four lecture courses, none of which enthralled or ignited, with 100 to 150 other graduate students, mostly master's candidates. In only one did the professor promise to read the graduate papers himself, and in none did he serve as even occasional section man.

However flat the courses, I still needed the approval of my adviser. Advisers at my university share one trait: they are absent, geographically or emotionally, when needed, with one ratio assured—the more urgent the need, the great-

er their distance away. My adviser was the literally absent—no worse, and perhaps better, than the adviser of several fellow candidates, so unrelated to them or to anyone else, that they often shared the same room with him thirty-five minutes or more before he showed enough awareness of their presence to say hello. My adviser, said his secretary—over the years to become one of my closest enemies—was in Afghanistan, whereupon I made a pale joke that Windermere or London I could understand, but whatever happened in old Hindu Kush involving William and Dorothy Wordsworth (His People)? Unsmiling, she told me the date of his return was unknown. As to my study cards which had to be signed within forty-eight hours, maybe someone else around would sign them. At the end of the corridor I found a professor who had made the mistake of keeping his office hours and before he knew I wasn't one of his own, I had snared his signature and fled.

At study-card-signing time, at the beginnings of the subsequent three quarters, my adviser was in New Delhi, Ghana, and Honolulu. Once, the third quarter, when he was not only in the country but in the building, we had an accidental brief encounter by the departmental coffee urn when I introduced myself. We discussed, as I remember, the new plastic spoons and their superiority in shape and length over those formerly supplied by the commissary. I did not badger him since by that time I had learned another fact of graduate life: an adviser must not only care, he must have sufficient status so that his caring counts, and mine had just been bypassed for tenure. Since he could give me nothing—and heaven knows I had nothing to offer him—and since it was clear I was already in search of a new adviser, with tenure, with a certain brisk dispatch, at approximately the same moment, Number One and I wrote each other off.

For the next year and a half I took, and helped perpetrate, a series of appallingly bad courses. Although I had taught before, no one expressed the faintest interest in my experience, and I was regarded no differently from my wholly inexperienced colleagues who were given no supervision or training, for anyone knows that the granting of graduate status is simultaneously and mystically a granting of the ability to teach. I wondered then, as I wonder now, when college students, accustomed in the top high schools to far superior teaching, will bestir themselves to rebellion and demand that college teaching at least occasionally approximate the excellence they experienced in their secondary education.

The worst of these courses, not untypically, was the Freshman Composition I taught. Critics advance many reasons for its failures, but one of the most crucial I have never seen presented. That is, the tension and conflict brought on by the contrast in the mode of writing student and instructor-candidate are being asked to do.

Dissertation writing observes configurations as inexorable as those of a pavane, with success an impeccable tracing of conventions. Also, one goal of dissertation writing in the humanities is to demonstrate that a verbal inquiry can attain the same, if not greater, elegance, precision, and impersonality as a quantitative inquiry. In dissertation writing, consequently, one modulates the individual voice so that it does not blare out above the form. Finally, one proceeds by the tentative, the suggested, the qualified, the possible. Stressed in dissertation writing are the conventional, the classic, the cautious.

To many of us, the goals of Freshman Composition are the very reverse. Freshman Composition tries to help the stu-

dent find his individual voice from out the social and economic conventions that for most of his seventeen years have worked to submerge it. It urges him to test his voice, or voices—plurality of situations requires each of us become a one-man chorus—privately, then publicly, perhaps for the first time in his life. Also, to students who cannot appreciate the power of the word when set against the power of the equation, Freshman Composition needs to stress the uniqueness of verbal expression—the ability of the word to do what the equation cannot, in conveying our opinion, our dream, our passion. Finally, to students who have been playing it as cool as the adults they emulate, Freshman Composition urges commitment. Stressed in Freshman Composition, in other words, are what is individual, unique, impassioned.

There is then a chasm between the modes of writing student and instructor are doing. If the instructor allows himself to become enclosed within his dissertation—a common form of entombment—there can be two effects upon his freshmen classes, both unfortunate. His envy for the freer and more imaginative endeavor the freshman are trying can dilute his participation in this endeavor. Or, more common, the instructor can insist his freshman follow the same model writing he must and become, completely irrelevantly for their needs and purposes, undergraduate doctoral candidates. I often wonder if the parochial, cynical, and supercilious grousing in faculty lounges about freshman illiteracy does not arise from the understandable refusal of the undergraduate to meet a totally inappropriate set of expectations.

During these years I did not make friends, at least with my fellow candidates in English. There were, you see, more of us than there were A's to be given out; and in our primitive society, grades, and grades only, counted with the doctoral committee, so much less sophisticated on this count than most seventh-graders I knew. Competition quickly did in commiseration and fellow feeling. I sought my friends, as did my fellow candidates, elsewhere. Unfulfilled stayed one of the greatest needs we had brought to graduate school: a sustained dialogue with those of similarly shaped sensibilities about our language and our literature.

During this period I also tried to decide what configuration of traits—a combination I obviously did not possess—assured the least damaging survival as a doctoral candidate. As I studied my compeers, it seemed the ones going through most swimmingly were poor, needed, young, and reverential.

Poverty—and I'm here of the straightforward economic kind—is useful. It makes possible the candidate's regarding as adequate remuneration for grading, section manning, and assorted grubbing, the pittances and doles many graduate schools call fellowships and scholarships. And only if he begins in an initial state of poverty will the tiny salary his degree will achieve for him seem astonishing and munificent enough to act as economic goad.

By needed, I mean responsibled, dependented, family-weighted. Traditionally, a wife and children are regarded as encumbrances and distractions. But since one's own compulsions are seldom potent enough to stay full-strength through the ordeal, the intrusions dependents represent are subordinate to the necessary pressure they exert for the candidate to keep up steam, to finish quickly and strongly.

Youth and a sense of reverence are intertwined traits. (Youth in the United States has nothing to do with chronology since we are perhaps the only country in history to produce octogenarian teenagers.) They are intertwined because the candidate should be young enough

to still believe in mystiques: of the inherent wisdom and humaneness of his elders; of the university that grants his degree; of the degree itself; of his profession; of his literature; of his language; of himself. The more of these a candidate exalts, the greater his likelihood, I believe, of attaining his degree undestructively to himself and to others. (Multivariate analysis and twirlers of matrices, start piloting your study.) Since I am not poor, nor needed, nor young—and especially since I seem to have been born with no sense of reverence—I accurately anticipated, and got, a bad time.

Take the matter of my Generals. After my year-and-a-half of teaching and being taught, I decided I was ready for that Marvel of Minutiae, the General Examination. I filled out Form 20459-Q and sent it in to the Doctoral Committee. Shortly thereafter I received a letter from the Committee: in reviewing the courses I had taken, they noted I had not presented one in comparative literature before the twentieth century. The catalogue had been silent about this requirement, but fortunately I had taken a course in comparative lit as part of my master's at another university. I told a fellow candidate I was writing the Committee to check the transcript of my Master's work and was given two facts: Doctoral Committees send but do not receive unsolicited communications, and all universities are completely solipsistic—courses at any other university, for purposes of full credit at theirs—do not exist. Fortunately, my current university's course in comparative lit was being offered the next quarter, so my Generals were put off while I took the course and brushed up on my Ovid, preparatory to my language exam in Latin—so central to my future life as a professor of twentieth-century American literature.

Like 50% of my fellow candidates, I did not pass my Generals the first time. Despite several months of trying to memorize the *Cambridge Companion*, at the crucial moment I could not remember such proofs of my literacy as the occupations of the Four P's in the play of the same name nor the piece of literature that commemorated the Battle of Khartoum.

The next fall I passed, and it was on to my orals. Mine were not eventful, but those of a fellow candidate's were, since, thanks to them, he is now a huckster on TV instead of a professor of English. His failures didn't relate to a lapse in a knowledge of Swift (*His* Man); it really didn't relate to him at all. He just had the misfortune to be at hand when a petty man needed an internecine weapon to try to shoot down a colleague.

The fuse-lighter was the sixty-four-year-old eighteenth-century specialist whose only friend in the department was, unfortunately for the candidate, the chairman. The enemy was the candidate's adviser, a thirty-two-year-old newcomer, a fluent and prolific eighteenth-century specialist soon up for tenure. The three members of the Orals Committee were the chairman of the department and the younger and older specialist.

Despite curved balls and miniscule cross-examinings the candidate left the orals room confident he had survived. Therefore it came as a shock when his adviser called him into his office to say that he had failed, 2-to-1. When he asked what recourse he had, he had an even greater shock; for the answer was "None." At our university what occurs within an orals room is as sacrosanct as what occurs in a confessional. Also, there are no records of what transpires—no notes, much less something as objective as a tape. Finally, in this instance, the chairman of the department was also a member of the doctoral committee:

the candidate was not allowed to bring his case before the rest of the committee unless the chairman of the department was present, and one can imagine the relative weighting of testimony. And so the candidate, despte a brilliant academic record and a highly regarded monograph—on Stella—was out of the profession, unless he chose to start again at another university, and, understandably, he did not choose. Oh, his adviser got tenure. Let's never expect logic to operate in academe; besides, my friend's demise seemed adequate expression of the older man's hostility.

After orals for me came the choice of thesis topic. Immediately out of the ground rose the Specter of Original Research. Only someone who has tried to find a wholly original thesis topic related to a major piece of American literature can fully appreciate how little first-rate literature we have produced, and how overworked the fields are. One solution is to turn frankly to the second-rate and to do a study, say, of the kinds of candy Hepzibah Pyncheon sold in her penny shop. One could title such a dissertation "The Epihany of Private Enterprise in Hawthorne." But at last I found my topic—if you know of others currently writing on the comparative use of dialogue in James and Howells, don't tell me about it—and I entered that dark backward and abysm of time that the thesis writer shares with all who have taken on the responsibility of daily, weekly, monthly, self-structuring their freedom. (The best description I know in literature of this terrifying timelessness—indeed, of the whole invitation to apathy graduate life extends—is Jack Burden's career at "State" in Chapter Four of *All the King's Men.*) This is where I am now; and when I am not working on my thesis, which is frequently, I write choleric letters to deans (unmailed) and make lists of recommendations, like the following:

Hints For Attaining An Academic Illyria

ADMISSIONS: The admission of a candidate, particularly at the doctoral level, should be an expression of mutual commitment, not only of the student to the school and, more important, to his profession, but of the school to the student. Admission is the assumption of joint responsibility, with the school promising to perform both the tangibles and intangibles to help the candidate through an inevitably difficult experience. And since character is clearly as central for survival as academic attainments or Graduate Records, personal interviews and other forms of screening should be regarded as vital admission procedures.

ADVISERS: Advising should be regarded as so important a part of faculty responsibility that the duties should be a formal part of contractual arrangements, with specific hours submitted by every adviser when he will not only be regularly available (at least an hour per candidate every two weeks) but attuned and concerned. Any faculty member not willing to observe such a commitment should not advise.

TRAINING OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS: If academic responsibility is to asked, formal training and supervision should be given. Models here, as always, are more important than mouthings.

GENERALS: Eliminate the minutiae.

ORALS: Tape them. In the event a candidate feels he has been used as an internecine ballistics missile or unjustly treated in any other way, let there be a Court of Appeals composed of faculty, administration, *and his fellow candidates* to whom he has recourse.

STATUS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES: Give them some, such as representation on the Doctoral Committee. Shortly, they are to be colleagues and fellow leaders of your profession. Treat them as such. Curiously enough, one does not learn to be a leader if one is never allowed to lead.

DISSERTATION: Put into practice immediately the proposal of G. B. Harrison in *Profession of English.* No candidate should spend more than six months on a thesis. Once finished, it should be thrown on a giant pyre, the ashes rescued, and placed in an amulet the candidate wears the rest

of his academic life, to ward off such evil spirits as the Pretense of Wholly Original Research and the Illusion of Omnipotence.

A logical question at this point might well be "Why not show some guts and rebel?" I plan to, after I get my degree. A Ph.D. is a professional necessity, and it will give me the status I need to be heard and to start or to join the foment. My only fear is that once I am out, like so many others I will go over to the enemy instead of becoming a member of a new generation. And one determined generation is all it would probably take to effect a change: one generation whose training in the liberal arts had truly freed them to give, where they had found pettiness, largesse; where they had met callousness, compassion; and where they had met empyrean ignorance, wisdom and simple common sense.

Writing this has been for me re-assuring. Clearly something I feared extinct is not—yet. But I have perhaps two more years ahead. Will motivation and a precariously maintained adulthood survive the full course? Pray let them. And to all others of like minds and no status, courage and strength.

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"I was thrown a bunch of A's and B's to eat."

A RITE OF PASSAGE should take place during one dark, frightening phase of the moon, not four years of expense, attendance, practice, and test taking. Now is a good time to reflect; now, before I, too, become a shareman of the department, a tribal father waving my magic totem in the face of the next generation of initiates, confronting them with the taboos, showing them by my example how to hunt the big game.

However dark the future, the past looks bright. During my undergraduate years, I met my first fine teacher and decided, thereupon, to take his learning and his irony to be my own. The desire to imitate was strong. We sat there, eleven approximate sophomores, through a semester of Cicero's letters and inflicted our incompetence on him, our muddle crass minds. I identified with his struggle to bring us to some sense of Latin urbanity and an experience of the fate of the Republic. So, when he did not appear to administer the final examination, I understood; I understood, and dissuaded the eight girls in the class from calling his number. They thought he must be sick or had forgotten the day and hour. Then I went for a cup of coffee and discovered my teacher at a table talking with a colleague. I moved over to tell him we had dispersed, certain I was unique among the flock of unmoved drudges, and heard him say to his friend, "Here comes one of them now."

Nevertheless, the next semester I took a course he offered in Greek drama. We used the Chicago translations by Lattimore and Grene which were then published and whatever else was available. We wrote three essays for that course, and I have never had any writing so helpfully read as were those papers. And there I learned to read literature, its motifs, its imagery, and coherence; and after class or walking on the street I

heard the names of Franz Kafka, Djuna Barnes, Samuel Beckett.

My teacher was an unpublished assistant professor. Next year the course in Greek drama—to which I had sent my close friends—was taught by an ass who had "introduced" Greek drama, who did puppet performances of *Medea* for the Humanities Society, and who I am sure I heard say, "Of course it loses a great deal in translation."

I would never be a classicist; but I was determined to study and to teach literature, and began graduate study in English. That was in 1958; and it is hard to believe now, but I had no idea that the program of English studies was in the hands, not of the wise dean who encouraged the variousness of my undergraduate program, but of several gentlemen called "the Malory man," "the Restoration drama man," and "the *Paradise Lost* man."

As lavish as Hamlet, I met first wonders I had never read. And I thought for a while, "Tread softly, for here you stand on miracle ground, boy." But as the journey lay before me, with its land of dreams, I discovered there was really neither miracles nor light. And the fathers, those men of the department, regarded me as, at best, a useful palanquin bearer. They would peek out now and then to direct me down the next alley of inert or discontinued information. I was thrown a bunch of A's and B's to eat.

The just due of the useful slave came next. I was awarded a graduate assistantship: an application for poverty granted as "an incentive and an opportunity to learn by doing." As an incentive it was well below anything you pay taxes on as income. The opportunity to learn came as does one to swim when you are thrown from a bridge. My wife walked through the dust to the Dempster-Dumpster with the garbage in the middle of three hundred acres of married-student barracks. I taught just under one hundred students something of composition in English for just over eighteen dollars each. And my children, who can splash in the rain of dry days and have all the hope of vain imagination, referred to the campus as "Daddy's school."

I was two years completing the requirements for the master's degree. The confusions and hostilities which grew during those four semesters plus a summer session were not entirely my own doing. I left with the M.A. in 1960, aged twenty-six, feeling that graduate English education, where the full professors and the new professors struggle for the main chance and between times read their notes at you, leaves a great deal to be desired.

The poor professor of English with his aimless, hyper-national, modern discipline, never quite deciding whether he is a critic of art, some kind of historical scholar, a teacher of the language, a showman beckoning over the distance to potential customers, all or none of these. A man licensed to teach in any National Model department of English, but a man who will not influence it for he cannot disentangle the requirements of any role he may assume from the requirements of self-promotion.

But the unkindest cut is knowing that he appears to many who can buy books, read, and write, a strutting sycophant, a square, a sort of voyeur watching Lady Art at her ablutions from atop a ridiculous portable stepladder which he has set up outside her window. He points to an indeterminate number of lines of marvels and talks about fragments and the footwear of criticism. He points to a work of whole excellence and talks about the history of scholarship.

For the graduate professor of English, the pricks afflicting his inferiors, only blunted by years, continue. And to them is added an unwillingness to view himself as a teacher of teachers. A war

scholar, he must publish or perish and so he specializes beyond his inclination and resource, holding before himself the picture of the few scholar-teachers who bless our Harvard, Princeton, and our Yale, and the carrot of a really profitable anthology. He looks on curriculum change as other men look on purse snatching, and with one hand writes up his justification of *The Profession of English* in terms of ideals he has diligently abandoned to those two ranks below him, while with the other he threatens to strike down candidates to his tribe on the grounds of their inadequate obedience.

But these are the reflections of someone who is not much short of his third degree, who has accepted the profession of English – as currently defined – and owns a complete collection of nine dollar anthologies illustrating English literary history. I keep a dog and bark myself.

My return to school came about after three years of full-time teaching from 1960 to 1963. This teaching is relevant to my reflections because it lay between the two parts of my graduate experience like the stuff of a sandwich; it was nourishing.

The M.A. appeared to have qualified me for a job in what an American Association of University Professors publication has called a "bush league" English department. There I became part of what the same publication called "the fluid bottom." So qualified–that is, without acquaintance with semantics, stylistics, logic, or educational methodology–I went to teach Freshman composition and, off my undergraduate cuff, world literature. There was also the usual Sophomore survey of British and American literature, but it was more familiar to me. The course anthology, in imitation of my collection of bloated university level ones, ran from *Beowulf* to Richard Wilbur, and, complete with headnotes, was designed to defeat any but the most fleeting experience of culture.

During those three years I learned that I could give myself to teaching almost without reserve and I found that the courses in composition and in world literature could be taught with honesty and, it may be, with some effect. The sophomore survey was a different matter. This course was the English department's main dish of gruel, taught to all, whereas the other courses were rather freely conceived General Education offerings in which English department members served along with a General Education staff. The survey asked no more than a dun grey rundown of literary historical commonplaces, illustrations provided on request. The anthology and progress through the centuries were prescribed by the full professors in the department; unlike the other courses which were constantly being altered, this one was above criticism. Apparently any anthology such as ours or the many like it, which had been put to use on several hundred thousand students, was above criticism.

So were the full professors. One of them wrote in a college report on accreditation, "The humor of the faculty with regard to change may be certified as optimistic." I keep the yellowing report as much for the sake of this sentence as for another section which documents the proportionate decline in undergraduates majoring in English.

No, I disliked such surveys as a student and found them impossible as a teacher. They make their appeal to the non-historian and to those sad pimps who find profit in merchandising the favors of a whore culture, tiny identifiable piece at a time.

During those three years of teaching, I also learned that unless I got the Ph.D. I would forever be a suspect instructor, suspiciously uncertified, paid by halves, perhaps even–as currently defined–a

fugitive from failure, at least permanently nonsuited of permanent employment. So last year I enrolled in another university to complete work toward the Ph.D.

Literature in English is divided, here, into seven "Groups" within the usual chronological and national boundaries. I must fill out—or "fatten up," as one professor put it—my knowledge of literary history by taking courses in those Groups where I have previously had the fewest courses. I swell attendance, completing the required hours, in three credit hour sessions of "lecture-discussion" with which the graduate professor —intent on his book during his waking moments—is filling out his required hours. I support Anglo-Saxon studies by perforce attending two semesters of that remote, thick tongue and I am only thankful that, somehow, Scottish literature and dialectology have disappeared from the curriculum. I have nothing to say about the seminars for which the students were unprepared and which the professors regarded as occasions for for reflective relaxation. They were pleasant enough; and we all preyed dutifully for topics.

All this may be bread and butter to wise and useful men; but I grind and churn. As a program it seems neither wise nor useful. It is not a training for teachers; few of us are proto-scholars; it is certainly not humanistic inquiry; it stunts concern for art and cheats history of its chief focus on the public affairs of men.

Perhaps I have been too docile in taking on poverty, obedience, and chaste mindedness, but gestures of rebellion were rather flops. A friend and I started a weekly of critical opinion at the beginning of our second year of graduate school. We sensed—at least I did in the English department—a good deal of buried outrage, and we wanted to provide a place where our fellows could point at folly. We had collected a little money and arranged to print our "Newspaper of Ideas and Opinions" in a shop which printed a country weekly thereabout. It was attractive, folio size with handset heads on newsprint. We managed just nine issues.

Each issue ran one hundred and eighty-five column inches of reviews of current local art and affairs along with criticism of the university housing policy (The Student as Revenue), the university's manner of handling labor-management disputes when students were the labor, and the typically consorious editorial policy of the university daily which the weekly was designed to supplement. There was criticism of various flapdoodle, food for fools, offered in the guise of public lectures, as well as a sports column which was expert social commentary. One issue printed only poetry, including work from two Lamont Poetry Selection authors. But what makes the now dated copies worth keeping are the epigrams which appeared, several in each issue. Any example would require several clippings from the university daily to show that they had particularity as well as force. This one was aimed at a Big Ten coach:

> *Exemplar* molds the characters of men;
> His mind is shrewd, his ethic absolute:
> Fake! Fake! The world's a standing stadium
> To cheer the fool, the lecher, and the brute.

But we made the mistake of editing some good writing for priggish reasons. I was getting further behind in my graduate work and further ahead in the size of my family. My co-worker on the paper exploded and disappeared from the face of the earth one day during an effort to explain, to someone who had asked, why we were always criticizing

things. Our failure, however, came chiefly because we could not get writing from the students for whom the weekly was intended. I had supposed that everyone in the English department would have a few pieces of ripe prose in their desk drawer; I had underestimated the amount of their devotion to Studies in the Quarterly of English and Germanic Philology.

The Newspaper of Ideas and Opinions continued, but in the more capable hands of its first and continuing supporter. He was a librarian and lived among his books in better honesty than I. I had to finish a thesis on the conventions of the pastoral elegy.

At the same time—this was in 1960—I watched an excellent and bold quarterly, *The Graduate Student of English*, fold for about the same reasons. This small journal had run for three years attacking the main difficulties of graduate life with a good deal of intelligence. It printed critical bibliographies, summary articles on trends, on modern criticism, and on various Ph.D. requirements, as well as specialized articles and reviews. I had just begun teaching Freshman Composition—there were sixty-five of us "practice" teaching with the assistance of one professional down the hall—and the articles in the *GSE* on teaching composition were helpful, neither obvious nor promotional, but helpful.

Perhaps the value of the journal was most in evidence when its editors were attacking some hallowed totem or taboo. The New Criticism received some well-deserved Orwellian comment. The frail body of Old English was frowned upon. The Modern Language Association slave market was discussed. The editors did not attack the common professional madness of relegating broad questions to some part of a two or three hour examination while, lest an exclusively literary experience be gained, encouraging the most narrow topics for the eight or so weeks of term-paper investigation (e.g., the water imagery in *Lycidas*). They pointed to notable instances of self service special pleading by the tribal fathers; and they repeatedly asked why one could never discover by reading English studies that man was a political animal.

The journal failed. It never received financial support from a university, professional organization, or foundation. The editors were excessively self-conscious. But I gather from the concluding editorial that the great reason it failed was the continued evidence of indifference to such a journal by graduate students of English. It was multilith printed and, of course, not the big game we are being trained to hunt.

But these two instances of what I have called rebellion—and I may include the quacking of ducks on a bridge which can always be heard in English departments—would be nothing but predictable mishap or empty complaint were it not that there is an Establishment, a System, which should be overthrown. Every pony graduate school in the country should not be imitating every other. Most schools should adopt some of the changes often recommended with respect to the shamefully perfunctory but traditional late language requirements, the "contribution to knowledge," the exclusive diet of English literary history, and the complete absence of underlying unity in the typical program.

However, unlike other professions, our training is in the form of our practice. What we cannot realize in one place can be realized in another; so for the last years of my rite of passage I have decided to teach again full-time. This may prolong the years; but teaching as I will be doing seems better than sacrificial, full-time pursuit of the doctorate. At least it is much closer to that dream of learning which is the only claim I have to being, as they say, highly motivated.

I accept the eventual necessity of the doctorate. Without the Ph.D., what the Modern Language Association calls my *vita,* is incomplete. The parting of the ways, between my *vita* and me, came when I accepted the necessity of the Ph.D., not in order to become better educated, but in order not to be harrassed and penalized throughout my academic career for lack of that professional totem.

I could be content with this attitude were it not that my professors, those who taught and often studied as if art were short and life were very long, must have accepted just such a necessity.

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"a nagging sense of dislocation . . ."

Dear Ken,

I wrote the first draft of this letter to tell you why I couldn't write about my graduate experience. My reasons were good, cautious graduate-student reasons: I said I hadn't achieved enough distance to write well about the subject; I wondered what I could add to the proliferating discussion (see, for example, the Winter 1964 *Carleton Miscellany*); and I explained that my enrolling in graduate school seems to have been occasioned by a failure of nerve, since I scuttled into it after two summers' disappointing work on my novel. This seemed to me to cast doubt on the validity of the anger I often feel—perhaps I am angry only with myself.

I think those were sound reasons for not writing an essay—if the essay were to be a reasoned and balanced argument, that is. But of course you didn't ask me to measure the dimensions of graduate training, to make proposals that could be asked upon by a faculty committee; you asked me for an account of my experience. I would certainly be a poor man to consider the question of Whither Textual Editing in The Graduate School? or other momentous matters, but I can, perhaps, say something about what has happened to me. So I have thrown away the first letter and written this one, keeping to the form of the letter because what I have to say doesn't seem to fit a neater form. In what follows I haven't attempted to emulate Henry Adams, who carried objectivity to the ironic point of erasing himself from his autobiography. Instead I have taken my cue from the frog in Aesop's *Fable* who fell into the milk bowl. Unable to scale the slick sides of the bowl, the frog thrashed about until he had churned an island of butter, from which he was able to hop to freedom. This letter, this communique from my milk bowl, is a record of thrashings, and if my little island is too slippery or too small or too private for others to stand upon, I can only advise them to find a raft of statistics.

It may seem wilfull to begin this record in the wheatfields of eastern Colorado, but my relatives have a good deal to do with what I want to say, and they live in eastern Colorado. Each summer I go home to help harvest the family wheat. For one or two weeks I work under a heavy-hot sun, doing all the things that once were the daily stuff of my life. I deal with wheat, not with

ideas: Wallace Stevens forgotten, I crack the fat red berries between my teeth to see if they are ready to thresh, and the setting of the straw-walker on the combine is more important than allegory in the *Faerie Queene*. I drive the combine through the delicate shafts of straw watching warily the thunderheads in the west that might hold hail, and I scoop grain in the galvanized heat of a bin. All of this gives me a pleasantly deceptive feeling of really being home, a sense that is strengthened by certain constant parts of the homecoming ritual. I can look for a sour-cream raisin pie at noon meal of the second day of my visit, I know that my father will recall the year the wheat made 58 bushels to the acre, and sometime during harvest one of my cousins will offer me a chew of tobacco and a faintly taunting remark about the habits of professors, both of which I will accept.

But this convivial chinking together of the homecoming ritual doesn't obscure the fact that, to most of the members of our large family, I am a failure. The more positive of my uncles and cousins think of me as an "educated fool," belonging roughly in the same class as the county agent who laboriously identified bindweed by looking it up in a book, while others take the softer view that I am a student merely because I am too lazy to be a wheat farmer. This judgment is an old fact of my life, and I don't think I'm overstating it. That I was a lazy, muddled, skewed child, one who would probably be walking down by the river if he were needed to take a broken combine part to the blacksmith for welding, was decided by the bright suns of my juvenile sky, the men who broke horses and drove combines. They knew what they were doing—that showed in every movement of their thick bodies—and so they had to be right about me. I knew I wasn't lazy, but I accepted their estimate; when I fell asleep while driving a tractor and dragged a one-way plow through a barbed wire fence, for example, I didn't tell my uncles that I had stayed awake all night reading *The Grapes of Wrath*. To account for my drowsiness that way would have been useless, even impertinent, so I simply said that I couldn't stay awake, thereby furnishing the whole community with a cherished joke.

I don't tell you this in order to exhibit myself as a sensitive young plant trapped in a wheat field. It does have some bearing on my life as a graduate student, as I hope to show. But for now the point I want to make is that I had early practice in accepting two contradictory ideas about myself: I knew that what my relatives saw as slothfulness in me wasn't that at all, but I accepted their judgment of me.

This wouldn't have been so clear to me three weeks ago. On my last harvest trip this summer I garnered more than wheat; I saw how deeply the arrogant values of my relatives had penetrated. And even though what happened at home this summer seems to me improbable, something more fitting for a Steig cartoon about Dreams of Glory than for an important event of my life, it is true that a silly, childish quarrel did allow me to glimpse something of myself, and this needs to be churned up with the rest.

The way it began was not unusual. Uncle John, the wit in our family, needles me every year about my effete student's life. Last year it was the shorts and sandals I was wearing when I arrived: "Is that what schoolmarms are wearing?" This year he mined the vein that I had gotten too soft to stay aboard anything more dangerous than a swivel chair. At the huge harvest table, before an appreciative audience, or out in the field, while we greased and gassed the machines, he talked of a two-year old filly he owned. She was still unbroken,

having thrown John twice, and he kept challenging me to break her. (Once this wouldn't have been a joke; it is part of the family mythology that anyone so muddle-headed as I was as a child had to be good with animals, so if this had happened while I was a teen-ager, I would have been asked seriously to do the job, even though John has always been a better rider than I.) Although it's been ten years since I tried to act like Jim Shoulders, John and the family left me no out, and when my young relatives began to snicker at the bare mention of the horse, I thought I had to say I'd ride her. My wife was angry. She said it was adolescent of me—"Maybe you should brawl with the football player who sneers in class; it would be the same thing."—and refused to go out to Uncle John's place with me.

So I found myself, late one Sunday afternoon after the wheat was cut, standing in a corral with my hand on the wet, quivering hide of a sorrel horse, waiting for John to chinch up the saddle. The horse was scared and so was I; once I had known more about horses than about Henry James, but that had been a long time ago. About twenty cousins, uncles and other relatives sat along the fences, waiting for what promised to be a very short rodeo. I wished insanely for the audience to be blindfolded as the horse was. I was sure I'd be thrown.

But I wasn't. I rode her, rode her down until her legs were flaccid and her coat lathered and I don't think altogether in my life I have felt a sweeter moment than when I whipped the reins across her flank and she shambled into a tired trot. My jaw was numb from my leaning too far forward in the saddle when she tossed her hand, and the insides of my legs were rubbed raw because I hadn't worn chaps, but a broken leg wouldn't have been too much to pay.

Later, sitting in the yellow, noisy kitchen that had been built by my great-grandfather in 1885, we drank and talked. The occasion was festive. I'm not sure why my relatives were pleased—and I suspect most of them had been John's victims too, and perhaps that was part of it—but for myself, I was happy to be completely comfortable for the first time in my life with my family. As I sucked whiskey through teeth that barely opened it struck me that riding the horse should have brought me closer to the family—as it had, but in a strange way. I was comfortable not because I felt I was really one of them, not because I had proved myself according to their rules; rather, it was because I could accept the differences in myself.

Now, all of this sounds, even to me, suspiciously like one of these hokey *Reader's Digest* stories: I Rode A Bronc and Found Security. When I went home, a little drunk, and told my wife about it, she said as much. Banal or not, the thing happened, and my attitude toward myself changed.

And even though it is a long and circuitous route from a wheatfield to corral to seminar room, the incident helped me to understand my feelings about being a graduate student. Throughout the past year, I have felt a disquieting sense of having been here before; something in the atmosphere reminds me of a past visit, a visit that was blandly unpleasant. There is nothing really ominous or fearful, just a nagging sense of dislocation, of being a displaced person. It is, of course, the atmosphere of my childhood, in evidence again here at graduate school. For just as the values of my family marked me off as an odd duck and made me at least apologetic for my strangeness, the values of my graduate school (not the stated values, the ones you feel and breathe) are also not mine. My uncles thought me hopelessly wrong-headed for preferring to collect wild-flowers over installing new piston

rings in a truck motor; my faculty, more refined and polite, merely suggests that the main business of my life is to be a critic. Another book about the allegory of *The Faerie Queene,* even another article for graduate students to mull over, would do more for me professionally than would a novel.

There. It's out. I've taken a long time to get around to repeating a cliché—namely, that graduate schools are less interested in creative effort than in critical ability. Everyone except me apparently knew this; I assumed that anyone who adopted literature as a profession would naturally be concerned with the production of a modern literature. But this is a naive assumption for me to make, showing that I am heir to my uncle's mistake; they assumed that anyone who lived on a wheat farm in eastern Colorado could ask for nothing more. At any rate, it is too easy to call names and too hard to prove charges, so I must identify my point as an entirely personal conviction that is unsupported by any statistics or polls: I am regarded as less of a student at my university for being a writer.

Not that I came to this university to learn to write. I wouldn't have gone anywhere, except to my books and my typewriter, to learn to do that. But I expected a certain community of interest, a certain encouragement or at least tolerance, so that a published short story would be roughly equivalent in value to a speech given at MLA on "Whither the Subjunctive?"

So my sense of *déjá vu* during this first year of doctoral study stems from the resemblance of my situation as a graduate student to my childhood. In both I have been subject to an avuncular patronizing; in both I have pursued my own course more or less in secret. I realize that the production of wheat is the main business of wheat-farming, just as the production of scholars is the main business of graduate schools, and I am ready to go along with these propositions so far as it pleases me. I can do and have done a good job of overhauling a truck motor, and I can and will write a competent dissertation, but I will be damned to Huck Finn's Hell before I grant that I should feel furtively ashamed of myself for being less than a dedicated mechanic or scholar. One needs money and one does what is needed to get it—but one needn't believe with Coolidge that the main business of America is business.

Of course I would like to drop out of this doctoral program, but I want to teach. I can't make my living by writing, at least not yet, and I don't want to return to driving a tractor or working as a carpenter or selling vacuum cleaners, nor do I want to continue teaching four sections of freshman composition, with 120 themes a week, as I've been doing for the past three years. I hope my tone here isn't truculent—I certainly don't feel aggrieved at having to earn a living. Not all of my reasons for wanting to teach are negative or economic, of course, but the more respectable reasons do sound pretentious and empty when spoken. The most I can say with any degree of truthfulness is that I am engaged with and committed to literature and ideals. I should like to do better. I should like to say I hope to inspire my students by showing them the great liberal tradition of thought and feeling, but that has an uncomfortably ashy taste in the mouth. Inspire them to what? One of the best students I taught last year is now in jail, convicted of rape; another, a boy who barely passed, is in Mississippi this summer, risking his life and whatever faith in humanity he possessed by working in the voter registration drive. I spoke of Milton to both of them. It's another of those questions I can't answer; I

have to leave it dangling here as it dangles in my mind.

So there it is, my little island of butter. Somehow, riding that horse allowed me to take my family and my school on my own terms. I am, admittedly, a kind of fugitive, but I no longer view myself as one of those "fugitives from the worlds of business and the exact sciences, who come to graduate school to raskolnikov," as one of the contributors to *The Carleton Miscellany* put it. The smugness of such a remark no longer convinces me that I am wrong.

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